IN THE BISHOP'S CARRIAGE

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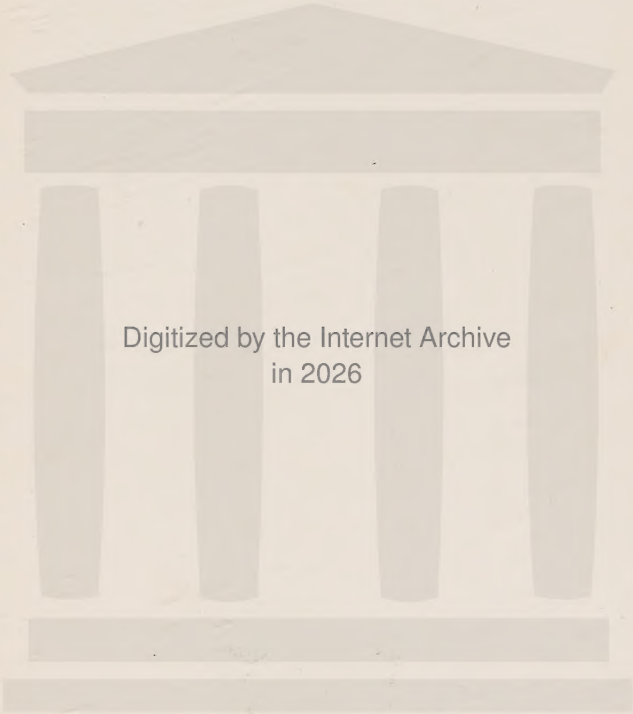

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By

MIRIAM MICHELSON

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I.

When the thing was at its hottest, I bolted. Tom, like the darling he is— (Yes, you are, old fellow, you're as precious to me as—as you are to the police—if they could only get their hands on you)—well, Tom drew off the crowd, having passed the old gentleman's watch to me, and I made for the women's rooms.

The station was crowded, as it always is in the afternoon, and in a minute I was strolling into the big, square room, saying slowly to myself to keep me steady:

"Nancy, you're a college girl—just in from Bryn Mawr to meet your papa. Just see if your hat's on straight."

I did, going up to the big glass and looking beyond my excited face to the room behind me. There sat the woman who can never nurse her baby ex-

cept where everybody can see her, in a railroad station. There was the woman who's always hungry, nibbling chocolates out of a box; and the woman fallen asleep, with her hat on the side, and hairpins dropping out of her hair; and the woman who's beside herself with fear that she'll miss her train; and the woman who is taking notes about the other women's rigs. And—

And I didn't like the look of that man with the cap who opened the swinging door a bit and peeped in. The women's waiting-room is no place for a man—nor for a girl who's got somebody else's watch inside her waist. Luckily, my back was toward him, but just as the door swung back he might have caught the reflection of my face in a mirror hanging opposite to the big one.

I retreated, going to an inner room where the ladies were having the maid brush their gowns, soiled from suburban travel and the dirty station.

The deuce is in it the way women stare. I took off my hat and jacket for a reason to stay there, and hung them up as leisurely as I could.

"Nance," I said under my breath, to the alert-eyed, pug-nosed girl in the mirror, who gave a quick glance about the room as I bent to wash my

hands, "women stare 'cause they're women. There's no meaning in their look. If they were men, now, you might twitter."

I smoothed my hair and reached out my hand to get my hat and jacket when—when—

Oh, it was long; long enough to cover you from your chin to your heels! It was a dark, warm red, and it had a high collar of chinchilla that was fairly scrumptious. And just above it the hat hung, a red-cloth toque caught up on the side with some of the same fur.

The black maid misunderstood my involuntary gesture. I had all my best duds on, and when a lot of women stare it makes the woman they stare at peacock naturally, and—and—well, ask Tom what he thinks of my style when I'm on parade. At any rate, it was the maid's fault. She took down the coat and hat and held them for me as though they were mine. What could I do, 'cept just slip into the silk-lined beauty and set the toque on my head? The fool girl that owned them was having another maid mend a tear in her skirt, over in the corner; the little place was crowded. Anyway, I had both the coat and hat on and was out into the big anteroom in a jiffy.

What nearly wrecked me was the cut of that coat. It positively made me shiver with pleasure when I passed and saw myself in that long mirror. My, but I was great! The hang of that coat, the long, incurving sweep in the back, and the high fur collar up to one's nose—even if it is a turned-up nose —oh!

I stayed and looked a second too long, for just as I was pulling the flaring hat a bit over my face, the doors swung, as an old lady came in, and there behind her was that same curious man's face with the cap above it.

Trapped? Me? Not much! I didn't wait a minute, but threw the doors open with a gesture that might have belonged to the Queen of Spain. I almost ran into his arms. He gave an exclamation. I looked him straight in the eyes, as I hooked the collar close to my throat, and swept past him.

He weakened. That coat was too jolly much for him. It was for me, too. As I ran down the stairs, its influence so worked on me that I didn't know just which Vanderbilt I was.

I got out on the sidewalk all right, and was just about to take a car when the turnstile swung round, and there was that same man with the cap. His face

was a funny mixture of doubt and determination. But it meant the Correction for me.

"Nance Olden, it's over," I said to myself.

But it wasn't. For it was then that I caught sight of the carriage. It was a fat, low, comfortable, elegant, sober carriage, wide and well-kept, with rubber-tired wheels. And the two heavy horses were fat and elegant and sober, too, and wide and well-kept. I didn't know it was the Bishop's then—I didn't care whose it was. It was empty, and it was mine. I'd rather go to the Correction—being too young to get to the place you're bound for, Tom Dorgan—in it than in the patrol wagon. At any rate, it was all the chance I had.

I slipped in, closing the door sharply behind me. The man on the box—he was wide and well-kept, too—was tired waiting, I suppose, for he continued to doze gently, his high coachman's collar up over his ears. I cursed that collar, which had prevented his hearing the door close, for then he might have driven off.

But it was great inside: soft and warm, the cushions of dark plum, the seat wide and roomy, a church paper, some notes for the Bishop's next sermon and a copy of *Quo Vadis*. I just snuggled

down, trust me. I leaned far back and lay low. When I did peek out the window, I saw the man with the brass buttons and the cap turning to go inside again.

Victory! He had lost the scent. Who would look for Nancy Olden in the Bishop's carriage?

Now, you know how early I got up yesterday to catch the train so's Tom and I could come in with the people and be naturally mingling with them? And you remember the dance the night before? I hadn't had more than three hours' sleep, and the snug warmth of that coach was just nuts to me, after the freezing ride into town. I didn't dare get out for fear of some other man in a cap and buttons somewhere on the lookout. I knew they couldn't be on to my hiding-place or they'd have nabbed me before this. After a bit I didn't want to get out, I was so warm and comfortable—and elegant. O Tom, you should have seen your Nance in that coat and in the Bishop's carriage!

First thing I knew, I was dreaming you and I were being married, and you had brass buttons all over you, and I had the cloak all right, but it was a wedding-dress, and the chinchilla was a wormy sort

of orange blossoms, and—and I waked when the handle of the door turned and the Bishop got in.

Asleep? That's what! I'd actually been asleep.

And what did I do now?

That's easy—fell asleep again. There wasn't anything else to do. Not really asleep this time, you know; just, just asleep enough to be wide awake to any chance there was in it.

The horses had started, and the carriage was half-way across the street before the Bishop noticed me.

He was a little Bishop, not big and fat and well-kept like the rig, but short and lean, with a little white beard and the softest eye—and the softest heart—and the softest head. Just listen.

"Lord bless me!" he exclaimed, hurriedly putting on his spectacles, and looking about bewildered.

I was slumbering sweetly in the corner, but I could see between my lashes that he thought he'd jumped into somebody else's carriage.

The sight of his book and his papers comforted him, though, and before he could make a resolution, I let the jolting of the carriage, as it crossed the car-track, throw me gently against him.

"Daddy," I murmured sleepily, letting my head rest on his little, prim shoulder.

That comforted him, too. Hush your laughing, Tom Dorgan; I mean calling him "daddy" seemed to kind of take the cuss off the situation.

"My child," he began very gently.

"Oh, daddy," I exclaimed, snuggling down close to him, "you kept me waiting so long I went to sleep. I thought you'd never come."

He put his arm about my shoulders in a fatherly way. You know, I found out later the Bishop never had had a daughter. I guess he thought he had one now. Such a simple, dear old soul! Just the same, Tom Dorgan, if he had been my father, I'd never be doing stunts with tipsy men's watches for you; nor if I'd had any father. Now, don't get mad. Think of the Bishop with his gentle, thin old arm about my shoulders, holding me for just a second as though I was his daughter! My, think of it! And me, Nance Olden, with that fat man's watch in my waist and some girl's beautiful long coat and hat on, all covered with chinchilla!

"There's some mistake, my little girl," he said, shaking me gently to wake me up, for I was going to sleep again, he feared.

"Oh, I knew you were kept at the office," I interrupted quickly. I preferred to be farther from the station with that girl's red coat before I got out. "We've missed our train, anyway, haven't we? After this, daddy dear, let's not take this route. If we'd go straight through on the one road, we wouldn't have this drive across town every time. I was wondering, before I fell asleep, what in the world I'd do in this big city if you didn't come."

He forgot to withdraw his arm, so occupied was he by my predicament.

"What would you do, my child, if you had—had missed your—your father?"

Wasn't it clumsy of him? He wanted to break it to me gently, and this was the best he could do.

"What would I do?" I gasped indignantly. "Why, daddy, imagine me alone, and—and without money! Why—why, how can you—"

"There! there!" he said, patting me soothingly on the shoulder.

That baby of a Bishop! The very thought of Nancy Olden out alone in the streets was too much for him.

He had put his free hand into his pocket and had just taken out a bill and was trying to plan a

way to offer it to me and reveal the fact to poor, modest little Nance Olden that he was not her own daddy, when an awful thing happened.

We had got up street as far as the opera-house, when we were caught in the jam of carriages in front; the last afternoon opera of the season was just over. I was so busy thinking what would be my next move that I didn't notice much outside—and I didn't want to move, Tom, not a bit. Playing the Bishop's daughter in a trailing coat of red, trimmed with chinchilla, is just your Nancy's graft. But the dear little Bishop gave a jump that almost knocked the roof off the carriage, pulled his arm from behind me and dropped the ten-dollar bill he held as though it burned him. It fell in my lap. I jammed it into my coat pocket. Where is it now? Just you wait, Tom Dorgan, and you'll find out.

I followed the Bishop's eyes. His face was scarlet now. Right next to our carriage—mine and the Bishop's—there was another; not quite so fat and heavy and big, but smart, I tell you, with the silver harness jangling and the horses arching their backs under their blue-cloth jackets monogrammed in leather. All the same, I couldn't see anything to cause a loving father to let go his onliest daughter

in such a hurry, till the old lady inside bent forward again and gave us another look.

Her face told it then. It was a big, smooth face, with accordion-plaited chins. Her hair was white and her nose was curved, and the pearls in her big ears brought out every ugly spot on her face. Her lips were thin, and her neck, hung with diamonds, looked like a bed with bolsters and pillows piled high, and her eyes— oh, Tom, her eyes! They were little and very gray, and they bored their way straight through the windows—hers and ours—and hit the Bishop plumb in the face.

My, if I could only have laughed! The Bishop, the dear, prim little Bishop in his own carriage, with his arm about a young woman in red and chinchilla, offering her a bank-note, and Mrs. Dowager Diamonds, her eyes popping out of her head at the sight, and she one of the lady pillars of his church —oh, Tom! it took all of this to make that poor innocent next to me realize how he looked in her eyes.

But you see it was over in a minute. The carriage wheels were unlocked, and the blue coupé went whirling away, and we in the plum-cushioned carriage followed slowly.

I decided that I'd had enough. Now and here in the middle of all these carriages was a bully good time and place for me to get away. I turned to the Bishop. He was blushing like a boy. I blushed, too. Yes, I did, Tom Dorgan, but it was because I was bursting with laughter.

"Oh, dear!" I exclaimed in sudden dismay. "You're not my father."

"No—no, my dear, I—I'm not," he stammered, his face purple now with embarrassment. "I was just trying to tell you, you poor little girl, of your mistake and planning a way to help you, when—"

He made a gesture of despair toward the side where the coupé had been.

I covered my face with my hands, and shrinking over into the corner, I cried:

"Let me out! let me out! You're not my father. Oh, let me out!"

"Why, certainly, child. But I'm old enough, surely, to be, and I wish—I wish I were."

"You do!"

The dignity and tenderness and courtesy in his voice sort of sobered me. But all at once I remembered the face of Mrs. Dowager Diamonds, and I understood.

"Oh, because of her," I said, smiling and pointing to the side where the coupé had been.

My, but it was a rotten bad move! I ought to have been strapped for it. Oh, Tom, Tom, it takes more'n a red coat with chinchilla to make a black-hearted thing like me into the girl he thought I was.

He stiffened and sat up like a prim little schoolboy, his soft eyes hurt like a dog's that's been wounded.

I won't tell you what I did then. No, I won't. And you won't understand, but just that minute I cared more for what he thought of me than whether I got to the Correction or anywhere else.

It made us friends in a minute, and when he stopped the carriage to let me out, my hand was still in his. But I wouldn't go. I'd made up my mind to see him out of his part of the scrape, and first thing you know we were driving up toward the Square, if you please, to Mrs. Dowager Diamonds' house.

He thought it was his scheme, the poor lamb, to put me in her charge till my lost daddy could send for me. He'd no more idea that I was steering him toward her, that he was doing the only thing possible, the only square thing by his reputation, than

he had that Nance Olden had been raised by the Cruelty, and then flung herself away on the first handsome Irish boy she met.

That'll do, Tom.

Girls, if you could have seen Mrs. Dowager Diamonds' face when she came down the stairs, the Bishop's card in her hand, and into the gorgeous parlor, it'd have been as good as a front seat at the show.

She was mad, and she was curious, and she was amazed, and she was disarmed; for the very nerve of his bringing me to her staggered her so that she could hardly believe she'd seen what she had.

"My dear Mrs. Ramsay," he began, confused a bit by his remembrance of how her face had looked fifteen minutes before, "I bring to you an unfortunate child, who mistook my carriage for her father's this afternoon at the station. She is a college girl, a stranger in town, and till her father claims her—"

Oh, the baby! the baby! She was stiffening like a rod before his very eyes. How did his words explain his having his arm round the unfortunate child? His conscience was so clean that the dear little man actually overlooked the fact that it wasn't

my presence in the carriage, but his conduct there that had excited Mrs. Dowager Diamonds.

And didn't the story sound thin? I tell you, Tom, when it comes to lying to a woman you've got to think up something stronger than it takes to make a man believe in you—if you happen to be female yourself.

I didn't wait for him to finish, but waltzed right in. I danced straight up to that side of beef with the diamonds still on it, and flinging my arms about her, turned a coy eye on the Bishop.

"You said your wife was out of town, daddy," I cried gaily. "Have you got another wife besides mummy?"

The poor Bishop! Do you think he tumbled? Not a bit—not a bit. He sat there gasping like a fish, and Mrs. Dowager Diamonds, surprised by my sudden attack, stood bolt upright, about as pleasant to hug as—as you are, Tom, when you're jealous.

The trouble with the Bishop's set is that it's deadly slow. Now, if I had really been the Bishop's daughter—all right, I'll go on.

"Oh, mummy," I went on quickly. You know how I said it, Tom—the way I told you after that

last row that Dan Christensen wasn't near so good-looking as you—remember? "Oh, mummy, you don't know how good it feels to get home. Out there at that awful college, studying and studying and studying, sometimes I thought I'd lose my senses. There's a girl out there now suffering from nervous prostration. She worked so hard preparing for the mid-years. What's her name? I can't think—I can't think, my head's so tired. But it sounds like mine, a lot like mine. Once—I think it was yesterday—I thought it was mine, and I made up my mind suddenly to come right home and bring it with me. But it can't be mine, can it? It can't be my name she's got. It can't be, mummy, say it can't, say it can't!"

Tom, I ought to have gone on the stage. I'll go yet, when you're sent up some day. Yes, I will. You'll be where you can't stop me.

I couldn't see the Bishop, but the Dowager—oh, I'd got her. Not so bad an old body, either, if you only take her the right way. First, she was suspicious, and then she was scared. And then, bit by bit, the stiffness melted out of her, her arms came up about me, and there I was, lying all comfy, with

the diamonds on her neck boring rosettes in my cheeks, and she a-sniffling over me and patting me and telling me not to get excited, that it was all right, and now I was home mummy would take care of me, she would, that she would.

She did. She got me on to a lounge, soft as—as marshmallows, and she piled one silk pillow after another behind my back.

"Come, dear, let me help you off with your coat," she cooed, bending over me.

"Oh, mummy, it's so cold! Can't I please keep it on?"

To let that coat off me was to give the whole thing away. My rig underneath, though good enough for your girl, Tom, on a holiday, wasn't just what they wear in the Square. And, d'ye know, you'll say it's silly, but I had a conviction that with that coat I should say good-by to the nerve I'd had since I got into the Bishop's carriage,—and from there into society. I let her take the hat, though, and I could see by the way she handled it that it was all right—the thing; her kind, you know. Oh, the girl I got it from had good taste, all right.

I closed my eyes for a moment as I lay there and

she stood stroking my hair. She must have thought I'd fallen asleep, for she turned to the Bishop, and holding out her hand, she said softly:

"My dear, dear Bishop, you are the best-hearted, the saintliest man on earth. Because you are so beautifully clean-souled yourself, you must pardon me. I am ashamed to say it, but I shall have no rest till I do. When I saw you in the carriage downtown, with that poor, demented child, I thought, for just a moment—oh, can you forgive me? It shows what an evil mind I have. But you, who know so well what Edward is, what my life has been with him, will see how much reason I have to be suspicious of all men!"

I shook, I laughed so hard. What a corker her Edward must be! See, Tom, poor old Mrs. Dowager up in the Square having the same devil's luck with her man as Molly Elliott down in the Alley has with hers. I wonder if you're all alike. No, for there's the Bishop. He had taken her hand sympathizingly, forgivingly, but his silence made me curious. I knew he wouldn't let the old lady believe for a moment I was luny, if once he could be sure himself that I wasn't. You lie, Tom Dorgan, he wouldn't! Well— But the poor baby, how could

he expect to see through a game that had caught the Dowager herself? Still, I could hear him walking softly toward me, and I felt him looking keenly down at me long before I opened my eyes.

When I did, you should have seen him jump. Guilty he felt. I could see the blood rush up under his clear, thin old skin, soft as a baby's, to find himself caught trying to spy out my secret.

I just looked, big-eyed, up at him. You know; the way Molly's kid does, when he wakes. I looked a long, long time, as though I was puzzled.

"Daddy," I said slowly, sitting up. "You—you are my daddy, ain't you?"

"Yes—yes, of course." It was the Dowager who got between him and me, hinting heavily at him with nods and frowns. But the dear old fellow only got pinker in the effort to look a lie and not say it. Still, he looked relieved. Evidently he thought I was luny all right, but that I had lucid intervals. I heard him whisper something like this to the Dowager just before the maid came in with tea for me.

Yes, Tom Dorgan, tea for Nancy Olden off a silver salver, out of a cup like a painted eggshell. My, but that almost floored me! I was afraid I'd give myself dead away with all those little jars and jugs.

So I said I wasn't hungry, though, Lord knows, I hadn't had anything to eat since early morning. But the Dowager sent the maid away and took the tray herself, operating all the jugs and pots for me, and then tried to feed me the tea. She was about as handy as Molly's little sister is with the baby—but I allowed myself to be coaxed, and drank it down.

Tea, Tom Dorgan. Ever taste tea? If you knew how to behave yourself in polite society, I'd give you a card to my friend, the Dowager, up in the Square.

How to get away! That was the thing that worried me. I'd just made up my mind to have a lucid interval, when cr-creak, the front door opened, and in walked—

Tom, you're mighty cute—so cute you'll land us both behind bars some day—but you can't guess who came in on our little family party. Yes—oh, yes, you've met him.

Well, the old duffer whose watch was ticking inside my waist that very minute! Yes, sir, the same red-faced, big-necked fellow we'd spied getting full at the little station in the country. Only, he was a bit mellower than when you grabbed his chain. Well, he was Edward.

I almost dropped the cup when I saw him. The Dowager took it from me, saying:

"There, dear, don't be nervous. It's only—only—"

She got lost. It couldn't be my daddy—the Bishop was that. But it was her husband, so who could it be?

"Evening, Bishop. Hello, Henrietta, back so soon from the opera?" roared Edward, in a big, husky voice. He'd had more since we saw him, but he walked straight as the Bishop himself, and he's a dear little ramrod. "Ah!"—his eyes lit up at sight of me—"ah, Miss—Miss—of course, I've met the young lady, Henrietta, but hang me if I haven't forgotten her name."

"Miss—Miss Muricson," lied the old lady, glibly. "A—a relative."

"Why, mummy!" I said reproachfully.

"There—there. It's only a joke. Isn't it a joke, Edward?" she demanded, laughing uneasily.

"Joke?" he repeated with a hearty bellow of laughter. "Best kind of a joke, I call it, to find so pretty a girl right in your own house, eh, Bishop?"

"Why does he call my father 'Bishop', mummy?"

I couldn't help it. The fun of hearing the Dowager lie and knowing the Bishop beside himself with the pain of deception was too much for me. I could see she didn't dare trust her Edward with my sad story.

"Ho! ho! The Bishop—that's good. No, my dear Miss Murieson, if this lady's your mother, why, I must be—at least, I ought to be, your father. As such, I'm going to have all the privileges of a parent—bless me, if I'm not."

I don't suppose he'd have done it if he'd been sober, but there's no telling, when you remember the reputation the Dowager had given him. But he'd got no further than to put his arm around me when both the Bishop and the Dowager flew to the rescue. My, but they were shocked! I couldn't help wondering what they'd have done if Edward had happened to see the Bishop in the same sort of tableau earlier in the afternoon.

But I got a lucid interval just then, and distracted their attention. I stood for a moment, my head bent as though I was thinking deeply.

"I think I'll go now," I said at length. "I—I don't understand exactly how I got here," I went on, looking from the Bishop to the Dowager and

back again, "or how I happened to miss my father. I'm ever—so much obliged to you, and if you will give me my hat, I'll take the next train back to college."

"You'll do nothing of the sort," said the Dowager, promptly. "My dear, you're a sweet girl that's been studying too hard. You must go to my room and rest—"

"And stay for dinner. Don't you care. Sometimes I don't know how I get here myself." Edward winked jovially.

Well, I did. While the Dowager's back was turned, I gave him the littlest one, in return for his. It made him drunker than ever.

"I think," said the Bishop, grimly, with a significant glance at the Dowager, as he turned just then and saw the old cock ogling me, "the young lady is wiser than we. I'll take her to the station—"

The station! Ugh! Not Nance Olden, with the red coat still on.

"Impossible, my dear Bishop," interrupted the Dowager. "She can't be permitted to go back on the train alone."

"Why, Miss—Miss Murieson, I'll see you back

all the way to the college door. Not at all, not at all. Charmed. First, we'll have dinner—or, first I'll telephone out there and tell 'em you're with us, so that if there's any rule or anything of that sort—"

The telephone! This wretched Edward with half his wits gave me more trouble than the Bishop and the Dowager put together. She jumped at the idea, and left the room, only to come back again to whisper to me:

"What name, my dear?"

"What name? what name?" I repeated blankly. What name, indeed. I wonder how "Nance Olden" would have done.

"Don't hurry, dear, don't perplex yourself," she whispered anxiously, noting my bewilderment. "There's plenty of time, and it makes no difference —not a particle, really."

I put my hand to my head.

"I can't think—I can't think. There's one girl has nervous prostration, and her name's got mixed with mine, and I can't—"

"Hush, hush! Never mind. You shall come and lie down in my room. You'll stay with us

to-night, anyway, and we'll have a doctor in, Bishop."

"That's right," assented the Bishop. "I'll go get him myself."

"You—you're not going!" I cried in dismay. It was real. I hated to see him go.

"Nonsense—'phone." It was Edward who went himself to telephone for the doctor, and I saw my time getting short.

But the Bishop had to go, anyway. He looked out at his horses shivering in front of the house, and the sight hurried him.

"My child," he said, taking my hand, "just let Mrs. Ramsay take care of you to-night. Don't bother about anything, but just rest. I'll see you in the morning," he went on, noticing that I kind of clung to him. Well, I did. "Can't you remember what I said to you in the carriage—that I wished you were my daughter. I wish you were, indeed I do, and that I could take you home with me and keep you, child."

"Then—to-night—if—when you pray—will you pray for me as if I was—your own daughter?"

Tom Dorgan, you think no prayers but a priest's

are any good, you bigoted, snickering Catholic! I tell you if some day I cut loose from you and start in over again, it'll be the Bishop's prayers that'll do it.

The Dowager and I passed Edward in the hall. He gave me a look behind her back, and I gave him one to match it. Just practice, you know, Tom. A girl can never know when she'll want to be expert in these things.

She made me lie down on a couch while she turned the lamp low, and then left me alone in a big palace of a bedroom filled with things. And I wanted everything I saw. If I could, I'd have lifted everything in sight.

But every minute brought that doctor nearer. Soon as I could be really sure she was gone, I got up, and, hurrying to the long French windows that opened on the great stone piazza, I unfastened them quietly, and inch by inch I pushed them open.

There within ten feet of me stood Edward. No escape that way. He saw me, and was tiptoeing heavily toward me, when I heard the door click behind me, and in walked the Dowager back again.

I flew to her.

"I thought I heard some one out there," I said.

"It frightened me so that I got up to look. Nobody could be out there, could they?"

She walked to the window and put her head out. Her lips tightened grimly.

"No, nobody could be out there," she said, breathing hard, "but you might get nervous just thinking there might be. We'll go to a room upstairs."

And go we did, in spite of all I could plead about feeling well enough now to go alone and all the rest of it. How was I to get out of a second or third-story window?

I began to think about the Correction again as I followed her upstairs, and after she'd left me I just sat waiting for the doctor to come and send me there. I didn't much care, till I remembered the Bishop. I could almost see his face as it would look when he'd be called to testify against me, and I'd be standing in that railed-in prisoner's pen, in the middle of the court-room, where Dan Christensen stood when they tried him.

No, I couldn't bear that; not without a fight, anyway. It was for the Bishop I'd got into this part of the scrape. I'd get out of it so's he shouldn't know how bad a thing a girl can be.

While I lay thinking it over, the same maid that had brought me the tea came in. She was an ugly, thin little thing. If she's a sample of the maids in that house, the lot of them would take the kink out of your pretty hair, Thomas J. Dorgan, Esquire, late of the House of Refuge and soon of Moyamensing. Don't throw things. People in my set, mine and the Dowager's, don't.

She had been sent to help me undress, she said, and make me comfortable. The doctor lived just around the corner and would be in in a minute.

Phew! She wasn't very promising, but she was my only chance. I took her.

"I really don't need any help, thank you, Nora," I said, chipper as a sparrow, and remembering the name the Dowager had called her by. "Aunt Henrietta is too fussy, don't you think? Oh, of course, you won't say a word against her. She told me the other day that she'd never had a maid so sensible and quick-witted, too, as her Nora. Do you know, I've a mind to play a joke on the doctor when he comes. You'll help me, won't you? Oh, I know you will!" Suddenly I remembered the Bishop's bill. I took it out of my pocket. Yep, Tom, that's where it went. I had to choose between

giving that skinny maid the biggest tip she ever got in her life—or Nance Olden to the Correction.

You needn't swear, Tom Dorgan. I fancy if I'd got there, you'd got worse. No, you bully, you know I wouldn't tell; but the police sort of know how to pair our kind.

In her cap and apron, I let the doctor in and myself out. And I don't regret a thing up there in the Square except that lovely red coat with the high collar and the hat with the fur on it. I'd give— Tom, get me a coat like that and I'll marry you for life.

No, there's one thing I could do better if it was to be done over again. I could make that dear little old Bishop wish harder I'd been his daughter.

What am I mooning about? Oh—nothing. There's the watch—Edward's watch. Take it.

II.

Yes, empty-handed, Tom Dorgan. And I can't honestly say I didn't have the chance, but—if my hands are empty my head is full.

Listen.

There's a girl I know with short brown hair, a turned-up nose and gray eyes, rather far apart. You know her, too? Well, she can't help that.

But this girl—oh, she makes such a pretty boy! And the ladies at the hotel over in Brooklyn, they just dote on her when she's not only a boy but a bell-boy. Her name may be Nancy when she's in petticoats, but in trousers she's Nathaniel—in short, Nat.

Now, Nat, in blue and buttons, with his nails kept better than most boys', with his curly hair parted in the middle, and with a gentle tang to his voice that makes him almost girlish—who would suspect Nat of having a stolen pass-key in his pocket and a pretty fair knowledge of the contents of almost every top bureau-drawer in the hotel?

Not Mrs. Sarah Kingdon, a widow just arrived from Philadelphia, and desperately gone on young Mr. George Moriway, also fresh from Philadelphia, and desperately gone on Mrs. Kingdon's—money.

The tips that lady gave the bad boy Nat! I knew I couldn't make you believe it any other way; that's why I passed 'em on to you, Tommy-boy.

The hotel woman, you know, girls, is a hotel woman because she isn't fit to be anything else. She's lazy and selfish and little, and she's shifted all her legitimate cares on to the proprietor's shoulders. She actually—you can understand and share my indignation, can't you, Tom, as you've shared other things?—she even gives over her black tin box full of valuables to the hotel clerk to put in the safe; the coward! But her vanity—ah, there's where we get her, such speculators as you and myself. She's got to outshine the woman who sits at the next table, and so she borrows her diamonds from the clerk, wears 'em like the peacock she is, and trembles till they're back in the safe again.

In the meantime she locks them up in the tin box which she puts in her top bureau-drawer,

hides the key, forgets where she hid it, and—O Tom! after searching for it for hours and making herself sick with anxiety, she ties up her head in a wet handkerchief with vinegar on it and—rings the bell for the bell-boy!

He comes.

As I said, he's a prompt, gentle little bell-boy, slight, looks rather young for his job, but that very youth and innocence of his make him such a fellow to trust!

"Nat," says Mrs. Kingdon, tearfully pressing half a dollar into the nice lad's hand, "I—I've lost something and I want you to—to help me find it."

"Yes'm," says Nat. He's the soul of politeness.

"It must be here—it must be in this room," says the lady, getting wild with the terror of losing. "I'm sure—positive—that I went straight to the shoe-bag and slipped it in there. And now I can't find it, and I must have it before I go out this afternoon for—for a very special reason. My daughter Evelyn will be home to-morrow and—why don't you look for it?"

"What is it, ma'am?"

"I told you once. My key—a little flat key that locks—a box I've got," she finishes distrustfully.

"Have you looked in the shoe-bag, ma'am?"

"Why, of course I have, you little stupid. I want you to hunt other places where I can't easily get. There are other places I might have put it, but I'm positive it was in the shoe-bag."

Well, I looked for that key. Where? Where not? I looked under the rubbish in the waste-paper basket; Mrs. Kingdon often fooled thieves by dropping it there. I pulled up the corner of the carpet and looked there—it was loose; it had often been used for a hiding-place. I looked in Miss Evelyn's boot and in her ribbon box. I emptied Mrs. Kingdon's full powder box. I climbed ladders and felt along cornices. I looked through the pockets of Mrs. Kingdon's gowns—a clever bell-boy it takes to find a woman's pocket, but even the real masculine ones among 'em are half feminine; they've had so much to do with women.

I rummaged through her writing-desk, and, in searching a gold-cornered pad, found a note from Moriway hidden under the corner. I hid it again carefully—in my coat pocket. A love-letter from Moriway, to a woman twenty years older than himself—'tain't a bad lay, Tom Dorgan, but you needn't try it.

At first she watched every move I made, but later, as her headache grew worse, she got desperate. So then I put my hand down into the shoe-bag and found the key, where it had slipped under a fold of cloth.

Do you suppose that woman was grateful? She snatched it from me.

"I knew it was there. I told you it was there. If you'd had any sense you'd have looked there first. The boys in this hotel are so stupid."

"That's all, ma'am?"

She nodded. She was fitting the key into the black box she'd taken from the top drawer. Nat had got to the outside door when he heard her come shrieking after him.

"Nat—Nat—come back! My diamonds—they're not here. I know I put them back last night—I'm positive. I could swear to it. I can see myself putting them in the chamois bag, and —O my God, where can they be! This time they're gone!"

Nat could have told her—but what's the use? He felt she'd only lose 'em again if she had 'em. So he let them lie snug in his trousers pocket—where he had put the chamois bag, when his eyes

lit on it, under the corner of the carpet. He might have passed it over to her then, but you see, Tom, she hadn't told him to look for a bag; it was a key she wanted. Bell-boys are so stupid.

This time she followed his every step. He could not put his hand on the smallest thing without rousing her suspicion. If he hesitated, she scolded. If he hurried, she fumed. Most unjust, I call it, because he had no thought of stealing—just then.

"Come," she said at last, "we'll go down and report it at the desk."

"Hadn't I better wait here, ma'am, and look again?"

She looked sharply at him.

"No; you'd better do just as I tell you."

So down we went. And we met Mr. Moriway there. She'd telephoned him. The chambermaid was called, the housekeeper, the electrical engineer who'd been fixing bells that morning, and, as I said, a bell-boy named Nat, who told how he'd just come on duty when Mrs. Kingdon's bell rang, found her key and returned it to her, and was out of the room when she unlocked the box. That was all he knew.

"Is he telling the truth?" Moriway asked Mrs. Kingdon.

"Ye—es, I guess he is; but where are the diamonds? We must have them—you know—to-day, George," she whispered. And then she turned and went upstairs, leaving Moriway to do the rest.

"There's only one thing to do, Major," he said to the proprietor. "Search 'em all and then—"

"Search me? It's an outrage!" cried the housekeeper.

"Search me if ye loike," growled McCarthy, resentfully. "Oi wasn't there but a minute; the lady herself can tell ye that."

Katie, the chambermaid, flushed painfully, and there were indignant tears in her eyes, which, I'll tell you in confidence, made a girl named Nancy uncomfortable.

But the boy Nat, knowing that bell-boys have no rights, said nothing. But he thought. He thought, Tom Dorgan, a lot of things and a long way ahead.

The peppery old Major marched us all off to his private office.

Not much, girls, it hadn't come. For suddenly the annunciator rang out.

Out of the corner of his eye, Nat looked at the bell-boy's bench. It was empty. There was to be

a ball that night, and the bells were going it over all the place.

"Number Twenty-one!" shouted the clerk at the desk.

But Number Twenty-one didn't budge. His heart was beating like a hammer, and the ting—ng —ng of that bell calling him rang in his head like a song.

"Number Twenty-one!" yelled the clerk.

Oh, he's got a devil of a temper, has that clerk. Some day, Tom, when you love me very much, go up to the hotel and break his face for me.

"You!—boy—confound you, can't you hear?" he shouted.

That time he caught the Major's ear—the one that wasn't deaf. He looked from Powers' black face to the bench and then to me. And all the time the bell kept ringing like mad.

"Git!" he said to the boy. "And come back in a hurry."

Number Twenty-one got—but leisurely. It wouldn't do for a bell-boy to hurry, particularly when he had such good cause.

Oh, girls, those stone stairs, the servants' stairs

at the St. James! They're fierce. I tell you, Mag, scrubbing the floors at the Cruelty ain't so bad. But this time I was jolly glad bell-boys weren't allowed in the elevator. For there were those diamonds in my pants pocket, and I must get rid of 'em before I got down to the office again. So I climbed those stairs, and every step I took my eye was searching for a hiding-place. I could have pitched the little bag out of a window, but Nancy Olden wasn't throwing diamonds to the birds, any more than Mag here is likely to cut off the braids of red hair we used to play horse with when we drove her about the Cruelty yard.

One flight.

No chance.

Another.

Everything bare as stone and soap could keep it.

The third flight—my knees began to tremble, and not with climbing. The call came from this floor. But I ran up a fourth just on the chance, and there in a corner was a fire hatchet strapped to the wall. Behind that hatchet Mrs. Kingdon's diamonds might lie snug till evening. I put the ends of my fingers first in the little crack to make

sure the little bag wouldn't drop to the floor, and then dived into my pocket and—

And there behind me, stealthily coming up the last turn of the stairs was Mr. George Moriway!

Don't you hate a soft-walking man, Mag? That cute fellow was cuter than the old Major himself, and had followed me every inch of the way.

"There's something loose with this hatchet, sir," I said, innocently looking down at him.

"Oh, there is? What an observing little fellow you are! Never mind the hatchet; just tell me what number you were sent to answer."

"Number?" I repeated, as though I couldn't see why he wanted to know. "Why—431."

"Not much, my boy—331."

" 'Scuse me, sir, ain't you mistaken?"

He looked at me for full a minute. I stared him straight in the eye. A nasty eye he's got—black and bloodshot and cold and full of suspicion. But it wavered a bit at the end.

"I may be," he said slowly, "but not about the number. Just you turn around and get down to 331."

"All right, sir. Thank you very much. It

might have got me in trouble. The ladies are so particular about having the bells answered quick—"

"I guess you'll get in trouble all right," he said and stood watching—from where he stood he could watch me every inch of the way—till I got to 331, at the end of the hall, Mrs. Kingdon's door.

And the goods still on me, Tom, mind that.

My, but Mrs. Kingdon was wrathy when she saw me!

"Why did they send you?" she cried. "Why did you keep me waiting so long? I want a chambermaid. I've rung a dozen times. The whole place is crazy about that old ball to-night, and no one can get decent attention."

"Can't I do what you want, ma'am?" I just yearned to get inside that door.

"No," she snapped. "I don't want a boy to fasten my dress in the back—"

"We often do, ma'am," I said softly.

"You do? Well—"

"Yes'm." I breathed again.

"Well—it's indecent. Go down and send me a maid."

She was just closing the door in my face—and Moriway waiting for me to watch me down again.

"Mrs. Kingdon—"

"Well, what do you want?"

"I want to tell you that when I get down to the office they'll search me."

She looked at me amazed.

"And—and there's something in my pocket I—you wouldn't like them to find."

"What in the world—my diamonds! You did take them, you little wretch?"

She caught hold of my coat. But Lordy! I didn't want to get away a little bit. I let her pull me in, and then I backed up against the door and shut it.

"Diamonds! Oh, no, ma'am. I hope I'm not a thief. But—but it was something you dropped—this."

I fished Moriway's letter out of my pocket and handed it to her.

The poor old lady! Being a bell-boy you know just how old ladies really are. This one at evening, after her face had been massaged for an hour, and the manicure girl and the hair-dresser

had gone, wasn't so bad. But to-day, with the marks of the morning's tears on her agitated face, with the blood pounding up to her temples where the hair was thin and gray—Tom Dorgan, if I'm a vain old fool like that when I'm three times as old as I am, just tie a stone around my neck and take me down and drop me into the nearest water, won't you?

"You abominable little wretch!" she sobbed. "I suppose you've told everybody in the office."

"How could I, ma'am?"

"How could you?" She looked up, the tears on her flabby, flushed cheek.

"I didn't know myself. I can't read writing—"

It was thin, but she wanted to believe it.

She could have taken me in her arms, she was so happy.

"There! there!" she patted my shoulder and gave me a dollar bill. "I was a bit hasty, Nat. It's only a—a little business matter that Mr. Moriway's attending to for me. We—we'll finish it up this afternoon. I shouldn't like Miss Kingdon to know of it, because—because I—never like to worry her about business, you know. So don't mention it when she comes to-morrow."

"No'm. Shall I fasten your dress?" I simply had to stay in that room till I could get rid of those diamonds.

With a faded old blush—the nicest thing about her I'd ever seen—she turned her back.

"It's dark to-day, ma'am," I coaxed. "Would you mind coming nearer the window?"

No, she wouldn't mind. She backed up to the corner like a gentle little lamb. While I hooked with one hand, I dropped the little bag where the carpet was still turned up, and with the toe of my shoe spread it flat again.

"You're real handy for a boy," she said, pleased.

"Thank you, ma'am," I answered, pleased myself.

Moriway was still watching me, of course, when I came out, but I ran downstairs, he following close, and when the Major got hold of me, I pulled my pockets inside out like a little man.

Moriway was there at the time. I knew he wasn't convinced. But he couldn't watch a bell-boy all day long, and the moment I was sure his eyes were off me I was ready to get those diamonds back again.

But not a call came all that afternoon from the

west side of the house, except the call of those pretty, precious things snug under the carpet calling, calling to me to come and get them and drop bell-boying for good.

At last I couldn't stand it any longer. There's only one thing to do when your chance won't come to you; that is, to go to it. At about four o'clock I lit out, climbed to the second story and there—Mag, I always was the luckiest girl at the Cruelty, wasn't I? Well, there was suite 231 all torn up, plumbers and painters in there, and nothing in the world to prevent a boy's skinning through when no one was watching, out of the window and up the fire-escape.

Just outside of Mrs. Kingdon's window I lay still a minute. I had seen her and Moriway go out together—she all gay with finery, he carrying her bag. The lace curtains in 331 were blowing in the breeze. Cautiously I parted them and looked in. Everything was lovely. From where I lay I reached down and turned back the flap of the carpet. It was too easy. Those darling diamonds seemed just to leap up into my hand. In a moment I had them tucked away in my pants pocket. Then down the fire-escape and out through

231, where I told the painter I'd been to get a toy the boy in 441 had dropped out of the window.

But he paid no attention to me. No one did, though I felt those diamonds shining like an X-ray through my very body. I got downstairs and was actually outside the door, almost in the street and off to you, when a girl called me.

"Here, boy, carry this case," she said.

Do you know who it was? Oh, yes, you do, a dear old friend of mine from Philadelphia, a young lady whose taste—well, all right, I'll tell you: it was the girl with the red coat, and the hat with the chinchilla fur.

How did they look? Oh, fairly well on a blonde! But to my taste the last girl I'd seen in the coat and hat was handsomer.

Well, I carried her suit-case and followed her back into the hotel. I didn't want to a bit, though that coat still—wonder how she got it back!

She sailed up the hall and into the elevator, and I had to follow. We got off at the third story, and she brought me right to the door of 331. And then I knew this must be Evelyn.

"Mrs. Kingdon's out, Miss. She didn't expect you till to-morrow."

"Did she tell you that? Too bad she isn't at home! She said she'd be kept busy all day to-day with a business matter, and that I'd better not get here till to-morrow. But I—"

"Wanted to get here in time for the wedding?" I suggested softly.

You should have seen her jump.

"Wedding! Not—"

"Mrs. Kingdon and Mr. Moriway."

She turned white.

"Has that man followed her here? Quick, tell me. Has she actually married him?"

"No—not yet. It's for five o'clock at the church on the corner."

"How do you know?" She turned on me, suddenly suspicious.

"Well—I do know. And I'm the only person in the house that does."

"I don't believe you."

She took out her key and opened the door, and I followed her in with the suit-case. But before I could get it set down on the floor, she had swooped on a letter that was lying in the middle of the table, had torn it open, and then with a cry had come whirling toward me.

"Where is this church? Come, help me to get to it before five and I'll—oh, you shall have anything in the world you want!"

She flew out into the hall, I after her. And first thing you know we were down in the street, around the corner, and there in front of the church was a carriage with Moriway just helping Mrs. Kingdon out.

"Mother!"

At that cry the old lady's knees seemed to crumble under her. Her poor old painted face looked out ghastly and ashamed from her wedding finery. But Evelyn in her red coat flew to her and took her in her arms as though she was a child. And like a child, Mrs. Kingdon sobbed and made excuses and begged to be forgiven.

I looked at Moriway. It was all the pay I wanted—particularly as I had those little diamonds.

"You're just in time, Miss Kingdon," he said uneasily, "to make your mother happy by your presence at her wedding."

"I'm just in time, Mr. Moriway, to see that my mother's not made unhappy by your presence."

"Evelyn!" Mrs. Kingdon remonstrated.

"Come, Sarah." Moriway offered his arm.

The bride shook her head.

"To-morrow," she said feebly.

Moriway breathed a swear.

Miss Kingdon laughed.

"I've come to take care of you, you silly little mother, dear. . . . It won't be to-morrow, Mr. Moriway."

"No—not to-morrow—next week," sighed Mrs. Kingdon.

"In fact, mother's changed her mind, Mr. Moriway. She thinks it ungenerous to accept such a sacrifice from a man who might be her son—don't you, mother?"

"Well, perhaps, George—" She looked up from her daughter's shoulder—she was crying all over that precious red coat of mine—and her eyes lit on me. "Oh—you wicked boy, you told a lie!" she gasped. "You did read my letter."

I laughed; laughed out loud, it was such a bully thing to watch Moriway's face.

But that was an unlucky laugh of mine; it turned his wrath on me. He made a dive toward me. I ducked and ran. Oh, how I ran! But if

he hadn't slipped on the curb he'd have had me. As he fell, though, he let out a yell.

"Stop thief! stop thief! Thief! Thief! Thief!"

May you never hear it, Mag, behind you when you've somebody else's diamonds in your pocket. It sounds—it sounds the way the bay of the hounds must sound to the hare. It seems to fly along with the air; at the same time to be behind you, at your side, even in front of you.

I heard it bellowed in a dozen different voices, and every now and then I could hear Moriway as I pelted on—that brassy, cruel bellow of his that made my heart sick.

And then all at once I heard a policeman's whistle.

That whistle was like a signal—I saw the gates of the Correction open before me. I saw your Nance, Tom, in a neat striped dress, and she was behind bars—bars—bars! There were bars everywhere before me. In fact, I felt them against my very hands, for in my mad race I had shot up a blind alley—a street that ended in a garden behind an iron fence.

I grabbed the diamonds to throw them from me,

but I couldn't—I just couldn't! I jumped the fence where the gate was low, and with that whistle flying shrill and shriller after me I ran to the house.

I might have jumped from the frying-pan? Of course, I might. But it was all fire to me. To be caught at the end is at least no worse than to be caught at the beginning. Anyhow, it was my one chance, and I took it as unhesitatingly as a rat takes a leap into a trap to escape a terrier. Only—only, it was my luck that the trap wasn't set! The room was empty. I pushed open a glass door, and fell over an open trunk that stood beside it.

It bruised my knee and tore my hand, but oh!—it was nuts to me. For it was a woman's trunk filled with women's things.

A skirt! A blessed skirt! And not a striped one. I threw off the bell-boy's jacket and I got into that dear dress so quick it made my head swim.

The jacket was a bit tight but I didn't button it, and I'd just got a stiff little hat perched on my head when I heard the tramp of men on the sidewalk, and in the dusk saw the cop's buttons at the gate.

Caught? Not much. Not yet. I threw open the glass doors and walked out into the garden.

"Miss—Omar— I wonder if it would be Miss Omar?"

You bet I didn't take time to see who it was talking before I answered. Of course I was Miss Omar. I was Miss Anybody that had a right to wear skirts and be inside those blessed gates.

"Ah—h! I fancied you might be. I've been expecting you."

It was a lazy, low voice with a laugh in it, and it came from a wheeled chair, where a young man lay. Sallow he was and slim and long, and helpless—you could see that by his white hanging hands. But his voice—it was what a woman's voice would be if she were a man. It made you perk up and pretend to be somewhere near its level. It fitted his soft, black clothes and his fine, clean face. It meant silks and velvets and—

Oh, all right, Tommy Dorgan, if you're going to get jealous of a voice!

"Excuse me, Mr. Latimer." The cop came in as he spoke, Moriway following; the rest of the hounds hung about. "There's a thieving bell-boy from the hotel that's somewhere in your grounds. Can I come in and get him?"

"In here, Sergeant? Aren't you mistaken?"

"No; Mr. Moriway here saw him jump the gate not five minutes since."

"Strange, and I here all the time! I may have dozed off, though. Certainly—certainly. Look for the little rascal. What's he stolen? Diamonds! Tut! tut! Enterprising, isn't he? . . . Miss Omar, won't you kindly reach the bell yonder —no, on the table; that's it—and ring for some one to take the officer about?"

I rang.

Do you know what happened? An electric light strung on the tree above the table shone out, and there I stood under it with Moriway's eyes full upon me.

"Great—!" he began.

"Just ring again—" Mr. Latimer's voice came soft as silk.

My fingers trembled so, the bell clattered out of them and fell jangling to the ground. But it rang. And the light above me went out like magic. I fell back into a garden chair.

"I beg your pardon, Mr.—was Moriway the name?—I must have interrupted you, but my eyes are troubling me this evening, and I can't bear the light. Miss Omar, I thought the housekeeper had

instructed you: one ring means lights, two mean I want Burnett. Here he comes. . . Burnett, take Sergeant Mulhill through the place. He's looking for a thief. You will accompany the Sergeant, Mr.—Moriway?"

"Thank you—no. If you don't mind, I'll wait out here."

That meant me. I moved toward the gate.

"Not at all. Have a seat. Miss Omar, sit down, won't you?" I sat down.

"Miss Omar reads to me, Mr. Moriway. I'm an invalid, as you see, dependent on the good offices of my man. I find a woman's voice a soothing change."

"It must be. Particularly if the voice is pleasing. Miss Omar—I didn't quite catch the name—"

He waited. But Miss Omar had nothing to say that minute.

"Yes, that's the name. You've got it all right," said Latimer. "An uncommon name, isn't it?"

"I don't think I ever heard it before. Do you know, Miss Omar, as I heard your voice just before we got to the gate, it sounded singularly boyish to me."

"Mr. Latimer does not find it so—do you?" I said as sweet—as sweet as I could coax. How sweet's that, Tom Dorgan?

"Not at all." A little laugh came from Latimer as though he was enjoying a joke all by himself. But Moriway jumped with satisfaction. He knew the voice all right.

"Have you a brother, may I ask?" He leaned over and looked keenly at me.

"I am an orphan," I said sadly, "with no relatives."

"A pitiful position," sneered Moriway. "You look so much like a boy I know that—"

"Do you really think so?" So awfully polite was Latimer to such a rat as Moriway. Why? Well, wait. "I can't agree with you. Do you know, I find Miss Omar very feminine. Of course, short hair—"

"Her hair is short, then!"

"Typhoid," I murmured.

"Too bad!" Moriway sneered.

"Yes," I snapped. "I thought it was at the time. My hair was very heavy and long, and I had a chance to sit in a window at Troyon's where they were advertising a hair tonic and--"

Rotten? Of course it was. I'd no business to gabble, and just because you and your new job, Mag, came to my mind at that minute, there I went putting my foot in it.

Moriway laughed. I didn't like the sound of his laugh.

"Your reader is versatile, Mr. Latimer," he said.

"Yes." Latimer smoothed the soft silk rug that lay over him. "Poverty and that sort of versatility are often bedfellows, eh? . . . Tell me, Mr. Moriway, these lost diamonds are yours?"

"No. They belong to a—a friend of mine, Mrs. Kingdon."

"Oh! the old lady who was married this afternoon to a young fortune-hunter!" I couldn't resist it.

Moriway jumped out of his seat.

"She was not married," he stuttered. "She—"

"Changed her mind? How sensible of her! Did she find out what a crook the fellow was? What was his name—Morrison? No—Middleway—I have heard it."

"May I ask, Miss Omar"—I didn't have to see his face; his voice told how mad with rage he was—

"how you come to be acquainted with a matter that only the contracting parties could possibly know of?"

"Why, they can't have kept it very secret, the old lady and the young rascal who was after her money, for you see we both knew of it; and I wasn't the bride and you certainly weren't the groom, were you?"

An exclamation burst from him.

"Mr. Latimer," he stormed, "may I see you a moment alone?"

Phew! That meant me. But I got up just the same.

"Just keep your seat, Miss Omar." Oh, that silken voice of Latimer's! "Mr. Moriway, I have absolutely no acquaintance with you. I never saw you till to-night. I can't imagine what you may have to say to me, that my secretary—Miss Omar acts in that capacity—may not hear."

"I want to say," burst from Moriway, "that she looks the image of the boy Nat, who stole Mrs. Kingdon's diamonds, that the voice is exactly the same, that—"

"But you have said it, Mr. Moriway—quite successfully intimated it, I assure you."

"She knows of my—of Mrs. Kingdon's marriage, that that boy Nat found out about."

"And you yourself also, as Miss Omar mentioned."

"Myself? Damn it, I'm Moriway, the man she was going to marry. Why shouldn't I—"

"Ah-h!" Latimer's shoulders shook with a gentle laugh. "Well, Mr. Moriway, gentlemen don't swear in my garden. Particularly when ladies are present. Shall we say good evening? Here comes Mulhill now. . . . Nothing, Sergeant? Too bad the rogue escaped, but you'll catch him. They may get away from you, but they never stay long, do they? Good evening—good evening, Mr. Moriway."

They tramped on and out, Moriway's very back showing his rage. He whispered something to the Sergeant, who turned to look at me but shook his head, and the gate clanged after them.

A long sigh escaped me.

"Warm, isn't it?" Latimer leaned forward. "Now, would you mind ringing again, Miss Omar?"

I bent and groped for the bell and rang it twice.

"How quick you are to learn!" he said. "But I really wanted the light this time. . . . Just light up, Burnett," he called to the man, who had come out on the porch.

The electric bulb flashed out again just over my head. Latimer turned and looked at me. When I couldn't bear it any longer, I looked defiantly up at him.

"Pardon," he said, smiling; nice teeth he has and clear eyes. "I was just looking for that boyish resemblance Mr. Moriway spoke of. I hold to my first opinion—you're very feminine, Miss Omar. . . . Will you read to me now, if you please?" He pointed to a big open book on the table beside his couch.

"I think—if you don't mind, Mr. Latimer, I'll begin the reading to-morrow." I got up to go. I was through with that garden now.

"But I do mind!"

Silken voice? Not a bit of it! I turned on him so furious I thought I didn't care what came of it—when over by the great gate-post I saw a man crouching—Moriway.

I sat down again and pulled the book farther toward the light.

We didn't learn much poetry at the Cruelty, did we, Mag? But I know some now, just the same. When I began to read I heard only one word—Moriway—Moriway—Moriway. But I must have forgotten him after a time, and the dark garden with the light on only one spot, and the roses smelling, and Latimer lying perfectly still, his face turned toward me, for I was reading—listen, I bet I can remember that part of it if I say it slow—

> Oh, Thou, who Man of baser Earth didst make,
> And ev'n with Paradise devise the Snake:
> For all the Sin wherewith the Face of Man
> Is blacken'd—Man's forgiveness give—and take!

—when all at once Mr. Latimer put his hand on the book. I looked up with a start. The shadow by the gate was gone.

> Yon rising Moon that looks for us again—
> How oft hereafter will she wax and wane;
> How oft hereafter rising look for us
> Through this same Garden—and for *one* in vain!

Latimer was saying it without the book and with a queer smile that made me feel I hadn't quite caught on.

"Thank you, that will do," he went on. "That is enough, Miss—" He stopped.

I waited.

He did not say "Omar."

I looked him square in the eye—and then I had enough.

"But what in the devil did you make believe for?" I asked.

He smiled.

"If ever you come to lie on your back day and night, year in and year out, and know that never in your life will it be any different, you may take pleasure in a bit of excitement and—and learn to pity the under dog, who, in this case, happened to be a boy that leaped over the gate as though his heart was in his mouth. Just as you would admire the nerve of the young lady that came out of the house a few minutes after in your housekeeper's Sunday gown."

Yes, grin, Tom Dorgan. You won't grin long.

I put down the book and got up to go.

"Good night, then, and thank you, Mr. Latimer."

"Good night. . . . Oh, Miss—" He didn't say "Omar"—"there is a favor you might do me."

"Sure!" I wondered what it could be.

"Those diamonds. I've got to have them, you know, to send them back to their owner. I don't mind helping a—a person who helps himself to other people's things, but I can't let him get away with his plunder without being that kind of person myself. So—"

Why didn't I lie? Because there are some people you don't lie to, Tom Dorgan. Don't talk to me, you bully, I'm savage enough. To have rings and pins and ear-rings, a whole bagful of diamonds, and to haul 'em out of your pocket and lay 'em on the table there before him!

"I wonder," he said slowly, as he put them away in his own pocket, "what a man like me could do for a girl like you?"

"Reform her!" I snarled. "Show her how to get diamonds honestly."

Say, Tom, let's go in for bigger game.

III.

Oh, Mag, Mag, for heaven's sake, let me talk to you! No, don't say anything. You must let me tell you. No—don't call the other girls. I can't bear to tell this to anybody but you.

You know how I kicked when Tom hit on Latimer's as the place we were to scuttle. And the harder I kicked the stubborner he got, till he swore he'd do the job without me if I wouldn't come along. Well—this is the rest of it.

The house, you know, stands at the end of the street. If you could walk through the garden with the iron fence you'd come right down the bluff on to the docks and out into East River. Tom and I came up to it from the docks last night. It was dark and wet, you remember. The mud was thick on my trousers—Nance Olden's a boy every time when it comes to doing business.

"We'll blow it all in, Tom," I said, as we climbed. "We'll spend a week at the Waldorf, and then, Tom Dorgan, we'll go to Paris. I want a red coat and

hat with chinchilla, like that dear one I lost, and a low-neck satin gown, and a silk petticoat with lace, and a chain with rhinestones, and—"

"Just wait, Sis, till you get out of this. And keep still."

"I can't. I'm so fidgety I must talk or I'll shriek."

"Well, you'll shut up just the same. Do you hear me?"

I shut up, but my teeth chattered so that Tom stopped at the gate.

"Look here, Nance, are you going to flunk? Say it now—yes or no."

That made me mad.

"Tom Dorgan," I said, "I'll bet your own teeth chattered the first time you went in for a thing like this. I'm all right. You'll squeal before I do."

"That's more like. Here's the gate. It's locked. Come, Nance."

With a good, strong swing he boosted me over, handed me the bag of tools and sprang over himself. . . . He looked kind o' handsome and fine, my Tom, as he lit square and light on his feet beside me. And because he did, I put my arm in his and gave it a squeeze.

Oh, Mag, it was so funny, going through Latimer's garden! There was the garden table where I had sat reading and thinking he took me for Miss Omar. There was the bench where that beast Moriway sat sneering at me. The wheeled chair was gone. And it was so late everything looked asleep. But something was left behind that made me think I heard Latimer's slow, silken voice, and made me feel cheap—turned inside out like an empty pocket—a dirty, ragged pocket with a seam in it.

"You'll stay here, Nancy, and watch," Tom whispered. "You'll whistle once if a cop comes inside the gate, but not before he's inside the gate. Don't whistle too soon—mind that—nor too loud. I'll hear ye all right. And I'll whistle just once if—anything happens. Then you run—hear me? Run like the devil—"

"Tommy—"

"Well, what?"

"Nothing—all right." I wanted to say good-by—but you know Tom.

Mag, were you ever where you oughtn't to be at midnight—alone? No, I know you weren't. 'Twas your ugly little face and your hair that saved you—the red hair we used to guy so at the Cruelty. I

can see you now—a freckle-faced, thin little devil, with the tangled hair to the very edge of your ragged skirt, yanked in that first day to the Cruelty when the neighbors complained your crying wouldn't let 'em sleep nights. The old woman had just locked you in there, hadn't she, to starve when she lit out. Mothers are queer, ain't they, when they are queer. I never remember mine.

Yes, I'll go on.

I stood it all right for a time, out there alone in the night. But I never was one to wait patiently. I can't wait—it isn't in me. But there I had to stand and just—God!—just wait.

If I hadn't waited so hard at the very first I wouldn't 'a' given out so soon. But I stood so still and listened so terribly hard that the trees began to whisper and the bushes to crack and creep. I heard things in my head and ears that weren't sounding anywhere else. And all of a sudden—tramp, tramp, tramp—I heard the cop's footsteps.

He stopped over there by the swinging electric light above the gate. I crouched down behind the iron bench.

And my coat caught a twig on a bush and its crack—ck was like a yell.

I thought I'd die. I thought I'd scream. I thought I'd run. I thought I'd faint. But I didn't—for there, asleep on a rug that some one had forgotten to take in, was the house cat. I gave her a quick slap, and she flew out and across the path like a flash.

The cop watched her, his hand on the gate, and passed on.

Mag Monahan, if Tom had come out that minute without a bean and gone home with me, I'd been so relieved I'd never have tried again. But he didn't come. Nothing happened. Nights and nights and nights went by, and the stillness began to sound again. My throat went choking mad. I began to shiver, and I reached for the rug the cat had lain on.

Funny, how some things strike you! This was Latimer's rug. I had noticed it that evening—a warm, soft, mottled green that looked like silk and fur mixed. I could see the way his long, white hands looked on it, and as I touched it I could hear his voice—

> Oh, Thou, who Man of baser Earth didst make,
> And ev'n with Paradise devise the Snake:
> For all the Sin wherewith the Face of Man
> Is blacken'd—Man's forgiveness give—and take!

Ever hear a man like that say a thing like that? No? Well, it's—it's different. It's as if the river had spoken—or a tree—it's so—it's so different.

That saved me—that verse that I remembered. I said it over and over and over again to myself. I fitted it to the ferry whistles on the bay—to the cop's steps as they passed again—to the roar of the L-train and the jangling of the surface cars.

And right in the middle of it—every drop of blood in my body seemed to leak out of me, and then come rushing back to my head—I heard Tom's whistle.

Oh, it's easy to say "run," and I really meant it when I promised Tom. But you see I hadn't heard that whistle then. When it came, it changed everything. It set the devil in me loose. I felt as if the world was tearing something of mine away from me. Stand for it? Not Nance Olden.

I did run—but it was toward the house. That whistle may have meant "Go!" To me it yelled "Come!"

I got in through the window Tom had left open. The place was still quiet. Nobody inside had heard that whistle so far as I could tell.

I crept along—the carpets were thick and soft

and silky as the rug I'd had my hands buried in to keep 'em warm.

Along a long hall and through a great room, whose walls were thick with books, I was making for a light I could see at the back of the house. That's where Tom Dorgan must be and where I must be to find out—to know.

With my hands out in front of me I hurried, but softly, and just as I had reached the portières below which the light streamed, my arms closed about a thing—cold as marble, naked—I thought it was a dead body upright there, and with a cry, I pitched forward through the curtains into the lighted room.

"Nance!—you devil!"

You recognize it? Yep, it was Tom. Big Tom Dorgan, at the foot of Latimer's bed, his hands above his head, and Latimer's gun aimed right at his heart.

Think of the pluck of that cripple, will you?

His eyes turned on me for just a second, and then fixed themselves again on Tom. But his voice went straight at me, all right.

"You are something of a thankless devil, I must admit, Miss—Omar," he said.

I didn't say anything. You don't say things in answer to things like that. You feel 'em.

Ashamed? What do I care for a man with a voice like that! . . . But you should have heard how Tom's growl sounded after it.

"Why the hell didn't you light out?"

"I couldn't, Tom. I just—couldn't," I sobbed.

"There seems invariably to be a misunderstanding of signals where Miss Omar is concerned. Also a dispositon to use strong language in the lady's presence. Don't you, young man!"

"Don't you call me Miss Omar!" I blazed, stamping my foot.

He laughed a contemptuous laugh.

I could have killed him then, I hated him so. At least, I thought I could; but just then Tom sent a spark out of the corner of his eye to me that meant —it meant—

You know, Mag, what it would have meant to Latimer if I had done what Tom's eye said.

I thought at first I had done it—it passed through my mind so quick; the sweet words I'd say —the move I'd make—the quick knocking-up of the pistol, and then—

It was that—that sight of Tom, big Tom Dor-

gan, with rage in his heart and death in his hand, leaping on that cripple's body—it made me sick!

I stood there gasping—stood a moment too long. For the curtains were pushed aside, and Burnett, Latimer's servant, and the cop came in.

Tom didn't fight; he's no fool to waste himself.

But I—well, never mind about me. I caught a glimpse of a crazy white face on a boy's body in the great glass opposite and heard my own voice break into something I'd never heard before.

Tom stood at last with the handcuffs on.

"It's your own fault, you damned little chump!" he said to me, as they went out.

You lie, Mag Monahan, he's no such thing! He may be a hard man to live with, but he's mine—my Tom—my Tom! . . .

What? Latimer?

Well, do you know, it's funny about him. He'd told the cop that I'd peached—peached on Tom! So they went off without me.

Why?

That's what he said himself when we were alone.

"In order to insure for myself another of your most interesting visits, I suppose, Miss—not Omar? All right. . . . Tell me, can I do

nothing for you? Aren't you sick of this sort of life?"

"Get Tom out of jail."

He shook his head.

"I'm too good a friend of yours to do you such a turn."

"I don't want any friend that isn't Tom's."

He threw the pistol from him and pulled himself up, till he sat looking at me.

"In heaven's name, what can you see in a fellow like that?"

"What's that to you?" I turned to go.

"To me? Things of that sort are nothing, of course, to me—me, that 'luckless Pot He marr'd in making.' But, tell me—can a girl like you tell the truth? What made you hesitate when that fellow told you with his eyes to murder me?"

"How did you know?"

"How? The glass. See over yonder. I could watch every expression on both your faces. What was it—what was it, child, that made you— oh, if you owe me a single heart-beat of gratitude, tell me the truth!"

"You've said it yourself."

"What?"

"That line we read the other night about 'the luckless Pot'."

His face went gray and he fell back on his pillows. The strenuous life we'd been leading him, Tom and I, was too much for him, I guess.

Do you know, I really felt sorry I'd said it. But he is a cripple. Did he expect me to say he was big and strong and dashing—like Tom?

I left him there and got out and away. But do you know what I saw, Mag, beside his bed, just as Burnett came to put me out?

My old blue coat with the buttons—the bell-boy's coat I'd left in the housekeeper's room when I borrowed her Sunday rig. The coat was hanging over a chair, and right by it, on a table, was that big book with a picture covering every page, still open at that verse about—

Through this same Garden—and for *one* in vain!

IV.

No—no—no! No more whining from Nance Olden. Listen to what I've got to tell you, Mag, listen!

You know where I was coming from yesterday when I passed Troyon's window and grinned up at you, sitting there, framed in bottles of hair tonic, with all that red wig of yours streaming about you?

Yep, from that little, rat-eyed lawyer's office. I was glum as mud. I felt as though Tom and myself were both flies caught by the leg—he by the law and I by the lawyer—in a sticky mess; and the more we flapped our wings and struggled and pulled, the more we hurt and tore ourselves, and the sooner we'd have to give it up.

Oh, that wizen-faced little lawyer that lives on the Tom Dorgans and the Nance Oldens, who don't know which way to turn to get the money! He looks at me out of his red little eyes and measures in dollars what I'd do for Tom. And then he sets his price a notch higher than that.

When I passed the big department store, next to Troyon's, I was thinking of this, and I turned in there, just aching for some of the boodle that flaunts itself in a poor girl's face when she's desperate, from every silk and satin rag, from every lace and jewel in the place.

The funny part of it is that I didn't want it for myself, but for Tom. 'Pon my soul, Mag, though I would have filled my arms with everything I saw, I wouldn't have put on one thing of all the duds; just hiked off to soak 'em and pay the lawyer. I might have been as old and ugly and rich as the yellow-skinned woman opposite me, who was turning over laces on the middle counter, for all these things meant to me—with Tom in jail.

I was thinking this as I looked at her, when all at once I saw—

You know it takes a pretty quick touch, sharp eyes and good nerve to get away with the goods in a big shop like that. Or it takes something altogether different. It was the different way she did it. She took up the piece of lace—it was a big collar, fine like a cobweb picture in threads,—you can guess what it must have been worth if that old sinner, Mother Douty, gave me fifteen dollars for it.

She took it up in a quick, eager way, as though she'd found just what she wanted. Then she took out a lace sample from her gold-linked purse and held them both up close to her blinky little eyes, looking at it through a gold lorgnette with emeralds in the handle; pulling it and feeling it with the air of one who knows a fine thing when she sees it, and just what makes it fine. Then she rustled off to the door to examine it closely in the light, and—Mag Monahan, she walked right out with it!

At least, she'd got beyond the inner doors when I tapped her on the shoulder.

"I beg pardon, madam." My best style, Mag.

She pulled herself up haughtily and blinked at me. She was a little, thin mummy of a woman, just wrapped away in silks and velvets, but on the inside of that nervous, little old body of hers there must have been some spring of good material that wasn't all unwound yet.

She stood blinking at me without a word.

"That lace. You haven't paid for it," I said.

Her short-sighted eyes fell from my face to the collar she held in her hand. Her yellow face grew ghastly.

"Oh, mercy! You—you don't—"

"I am a detective for the store, and—"

"But—"

"Sh! We don't like any noise made about these things, and you yourself wouldn't enjoy—"

"Do you know who I am, young woman?" She fumbled in her satchel and passed a card to me.

Glory be! Guess, Mag. Oh, you'd never guess, you dear old Mag! Besides, you haven't got the acquaintance in high society that Nance Olden can boast.

MRS. MILLS D. VAN WAGENEN

Oh—Mag! Shame on you not to know the name even of the Bishop of the great state of—yes, the lean, short little Bishop with a little white beard, and the softest eye and the softest heart and—my very own Bishop, Nancy Olden's Bishop. And this was his wife.

Tut—tut, Mag! Of course not. A bishop's wife may be a kleptomaniac; it's only Cruelty girls that really steal from stores.

"I've met the Bishop, Mrs. Van Wagenen." I didn't say how—she wouldn't appreciate that story.

"And he was once very kind to me. But he would be the first to tell me to do my duty now. I'll do it as quietly as I can for his sake. But you must come with me or I must arrest—"

She put up a shaking hand. Dear little old guy!

"Don't—don't say it! It's all a mistake, which can be rectified in a moment. I've been trying to match this piece of lace for years. I got it at Malta when—when Mills and I—on our honeymoon. When I saw it there on the counter I was so delighted—I never thought—I intended taking it to the light to be sure the pattern was the same, my eyesight is so wretched—and when you spoke to me it was the first inkling I had that I had really taken it without paying! You certainly understand," she pleaded in agitation. "I have no need to steal—you must know that—oh, that I wouldn't —that I couldn't— If you will just let me pay you—"

Here now, Mag Monahan, don't you get to sneering. She was straight—right on the level, all right. You couldn't listen to that cracked little voice of hers a minute without being sure of it.

I was just about to permit her graciously to pay me the money,—for my friend, the dear Bishop's

sake, of course,—when a big floor-walker happened to catch sight of us.

"If you'll come with me, Mrs. Van Wagenen, to a dressing-room, I'll arrange your collar for you," I said very loud. And then, in a whisper: "Of course, I understand, but the thing may look different to other people. And that big floor-walker there gets a commission from the newspapers every time he tells them—"

She gave a squawk for all the world like a dried-up little hen scuttling out of a yellow dog's way, and we took the elevator to the second floor.

The minute I closed the door of the little fitting-room she held out the lace to me.

"I have changed my mind," she said, "and shall give you the lace back. I will not keep it. I can not—I can not bear the sight of it. It terrifies me and shocks me. I can take no pleasure in it. Besides—besides, it will be discipline for me to do without it now that I have found it after all these years. Every day I shall look at the place in my collection which it would have occupied, and I shall say to myself: 'Maria Van Wagenen, take warning. See to what terrible straits a worldly passion

may bring one; what unconscious greed may do!' I shall give the money to Mills for charity and I will never—never fill that place in my collection."

"What good will that do?" I asked, puzzled, while I folded the collar up into a very small package.

"You mean that I ought to submit to the exposure—that I deserve the lesson and the punishment —not for stealing, but for being absorbed in worldly things. Perhaps you are right. It certainly shows that you have at some time been under Mills' spiritual care, my dear. I wonder if he would insist—whether I ought—yes, I suppose he would. Oh!"

A saleswoman's head was thrust in the door. "Excuse me," she said, "I thought the room was empty."

"We've just finished trying on," I said sweetly.

"Don't go!" The Bishop's wife turned to her, her little fluttering hands held out appealingly. "And do not misunderstand me. The thing may seem wrong in your eyes, as this young woman says, but if you will listen patiently to my explanation, I am sure you will see that it was a mere eager over-

sight—the fault of absent-mindedness, hardly the sin of covetousness, and surely not a crime. I am making this confession—"

The tender conscience of the dear, blameless little soul! She was actually giving herself away. Worse—she was giving me away, too. But I couldn't stand that. I saw the saleswoman's puzzled face—she was a tall woman with a big bust, big hips and the big head all right, and she wore her long-train black rig for all the world like a Cruelty girl who had stolen the matron's skirt to "play lady" in. I got behind little Mrs. Bishop, and looking out over her head, I tapped my forehead significantly.

The saleswoman tumbled. That was all right. But so did the Bishop's wife; for she turned and caught me at it.

"You shall not save me from myself and what I deserve," she cried. "I am perfectly sane and you know it, and you are doing me no favor in trying to create the contrary impression. I demand an—"

"An interview with the manager," I interrupted. "I'm sure Mrs. Van Wagenen can see the manager. Just go with the lady, Mrs. Van Wagenen, and I'll follow with the goods."

She did it meek as a lamb, talking all the time, but never beginning at the beginning—luckily for me. So that I had time to slip from one dressing-room to the next, with the lace up my sleeve, out to the elevator, and down into the street.

D'ye know what heaven must be, Mag? A place where you always get away with the swag, and where it's always just the minute after you've made a killing.

Cocky? Well, I should say I was. I was drunk enough with success to take big chances. And just while I was wishing for something really big to tackle, it came along in the shape of that big floor-walker!

He was without a hat, and his eyes looked fifty ways at once. But you've got to look fifty-one if you want to catch Nance Olden. I ran up the stairs of the first flat-house and rang the bell. And as I sailed up in the elevator I saw the big floor-walker hurry past; he'd lost the scent.

The boy let me off at the top floor, and after the elevator had gone down I walked up to the roof. It was fine 'way up there, so still and high, with the lights coming out down in the town. And I took

out my pretty lace collar and put it around my neck, wishing I could keep it and wishing that I had, at least, a glass to see myself in it just once, when my eye caught the window of the next house.

It would do for a mirror all right, for the dark green shade was down. But at sight of the shade blowing in the wind I forgot all about the collar.

It's this way, Mag, when they press you too far; and that little rat of a lawyer had got me most to the wall. I looked at the window, measuring the little climb it would be for me to get to it,—the house next door was just one story higher than the one where I was, so its top story was on a level with the roof nearly where I stood. And I made up my mind to get what would let Tom off easy, or break into jail myself.

And so I didn't care much what I might fall into through that window. And perhaps because I didn't care, I slipped into a dark hall, and not a thing stirred; not a footstep creaked. I felt like the Princess—Princess Nancy Olden—come to wake the Sleeping Beauty; some dude it'd be that would have curly hair like Tom Dorgan's, and would wear clothes like my friend Latimer's, over in Brooklyn.

Can you see me there, standing on one leg like a stork, ready to lie or to fly at the first sound?

Well, the first sound didn't come. Neither did the second. In fact, none of 'em came unless I made 'em myself.

Softly as Molly goes when the baby's just dropped off to sleep, I walked toward an open door. It was a parlor, smelly with tobacco, and with lots of papers and books around. And nary a he-beauty—nor any other kind.

I tried the door of a room next to it. A bedroom. But no Beauty.

Silly! Don't you tumble yet? It was a bachelor's apartment, and the Bachelor Beauty was out, and Princess Nancy had the place all to herself.

I suppose I really ought to have left my card—or he wouldn't know who had waked him—but I hadn't intended to go calling when I left home. So I thought I'd look for one of his as a souvenir—and anything else of his I could make use of.

There were shirts I'd liked for Tom, dandy colored ones, and suits with checks in 'em and without. But I wanted something easy and small and flat, made of crackly printed yellow or green paper, with numbers on it.

How did I know he had anything like that? Why, Mag, Mag Monahan, one would think you belonged to the Bishop's set, you're so simple!

I had to turn on the electric light after a bit—it got so dark. And I don't like light in other people's houses when they're not at home, and neither am I. But there was nothing in the bedroom except some pearl studs. I got those and then went back to the parlor.

The desk caught my eye. Oh, Mag, it had the loveliest pictures on it—pictures of swell actresses and dancers. It was mahogany, with lots of little drawers and two curvy side boxes. I pulled open all the drawers. They were full of papers all right, but they were printed, cut from newspapers, and all about theaters.

"You can't feed things like this, Nance, to that shark of a lawyer," I said to myself, pushing the box on the side impatiently.

And then I giggled outright.

Why?

Just 'cause—I had pushed that side box till it swung aside on hinges I didn't know about, and there, in a little secret nest, was a pile of those same crisp, crinkly paper things I'd been looking for.

20—40—60—110—160—210—260—310!

Three hundred and ten dollars, Mag Monahan. Three hundred and ten, and Nance Olden!

"Glory be!" I whispered.

"Glory be damned!" I heard behind me.

I turned. The bills just leaked out of my hand on to the floor.

The Bachelor Beauty had come home, Mag, and nabbed the poor Princess, instead of her catching him napping.

He wasn't a beauty either—a big, stout fellow with a black mustache. His hand on my shoulder held me tight, but the look in his eyes behind his glasses held me tighter. I threw out my arms over the desk and hid my face.

Caught! Nancy Olden, with her hands dripping, and not a lie in her smart mouth!

He picked up the bills I had dropped, counted them and put them in his pocket. Then he unhooked a telephone and lifted the stand from his desk.

"Hello! Spring 3100—please. Hello! Chief's office? This is Obermuller, Standard Theater. I want an officer to take charge of a thief I've

caught in my apartments here at the Bronsonia. Yes, right on the corner. Hold him till you come? Well—rather!"

He put down the 'phone. I pulled the pearl studs out of my pocket.

"You might as well take these, too," I said.

"So thoughtful of you, seeing that you'd be searched! But I'll take 'em, anyway. You intended them for—Him? You didn't get anything else?"

I shook my head as I lay there.

"Hum!" It was half a laugh, and half a sneer. I hated him for it, as he sat leaning back on the back legs of his chair, his thumbs in his arm-holes. I felt his eyes—those smart, keen eyes, burning into my miserable head. I thought of the lawyer and the deal he'd give poor Tom, and all at once—

You'd have sniffled yourself, Mag Monahan. There I was—caught. The cop'd be after me in five minutes. With Tom jugged, and me in stripes—it wasn't very jolly, and I lost my nerve.

"Ashamed—huh?" he said lightly.

I nodded. I was ashamed.

"Pity you didn't get ashamed before you broke in here."

"What the devil was there to be ashamed of?"

The sting in his voice had cured me. I never was a weeper. I sat up, my face blazing, and stared at him. He'd got me to hand over to the cop, but he hadn't got me to sneer at.

I saw by the look he gave me, that he hadn't really seen me till then.

"Well," he answered, "what the devil is there to be ashamed of now?"

"Of being caught—that's what."

"Oh!"

He tilted back again on his chair and laughed softly.

"Then you're not ashamed of your profession?"

"Are you of yours?"

"Well—there's a slight difference."

"Not much, whatever it may be. It's your graft —it's everybody's—to take all he can get, and keep out of jail. That's mine, too."

"But you see I keep out of jail."

"I see you're not there—yet."

"Oh, I think you needn't worry about that. I'll keep out, thank you; imprisonment for debt don't go nowadays."

"Debt?"

"I'm a theatrical manager, my girl, and I'm not on the inside: which is another way of saying that a man who can't swim has fallen overboard."

"And when you do go down—"

"A little less exultation, my dear, or I might suppose you'd be glad when I do."

"Well, when you know yourself going down for the last time, do you mean to tell me you won't grasp at a straw like—like this?" I nodded toward the open window, and the desk with all its papers tumbling out.

"Not much." He shook his head, and bit the end of a cigar with sharp, white teeth. "It's a fool graft. I'm self-respecting. And I don't admire fools." He lit his cigar and puffed a minute, taking out his watch to look at it, as coldbloodedly as though we were waiting, he and I, to go to supper together. Oh, how I hated him!

"Honesty isn't the best policy," he went on; "it's the only one. The vain fool that gets it into his head—or shall I say her head? No? Well, no offense, I assure you—his head then, that he's smarter than a world full of experience, ought to be put in jail—for his own protection; he's too

big a jay to be left out of doors. For five thousand years, more or less, the world has been putting people like him behind bars, where they can't make asses of themselves. Yet each year, and every day and every hour, a new ninny is born who fancies he's cleverer than all his predecessors put together. Talk about suckers! Why, they're giants of intellect compared to the mentally lop-sided that five thousand years of experience can't teach. When the criminal-clown's turn comes, he hops, skips and jumps into the ring with the old, old gag. He thinks it's new, because he himself is so fresh and green. 'Here I am again,' he yells, 'the fellow that'll do you up. Others have tried it. They're dead in jail or under jail-yards. But me—just watch me!' We do, and after a little we put him with his mates and a keeper in a barred kindergarten where fools that can't learn, little moral cripples of both sexes, my dear, belong. Bah!" He puffed out the smoke, throwing his head back, in a cloud toward the ceiling.

I sprang from my seat and faced him. I was tingling all through. I didn't care a rap what became of me for just that minute. I forgot

about Tom. I prayed that the cop wouldn't come for a minute yet—but only that I might answer him.

"You're mighty smart, ain't you? You can sit back here and sneer at me, can't you? And feel so big and smart and triumphant! What've you done but catch a girl at her first bungling job! It makes you feel awfully cocky, don't it? 'What a big man am I!' Bah!" I blew the smoke up toward the ceiling from my mouth, with just that satisfied gall that he had had; or rather, I pretended to. He let down the front legs of his chair and began to stare at me.

"And you don't know it all, Mr. Manager, not you. Your clown-criminal don't jump into the ring because he's so full of fun he can't stay out. He goes in for the same reason the real clown does—because he gets hungry and thirsty and sleepy and tired like other men, and he's got to fill his stomach and cover his back and get a place to sleep. And it's because your kind gets too much, that my kind gets so little it has to piece it out with this sort of thing. No, you don't know it quite all.

"There's a girl named Nancy Olden that could tell you a lot, smart as you are. She could show

you the inside of the Cruelty, where she was put so young she never knew that children had mothers and fathers, till a red-haired girl named Mag Monahan told her; and then she was mighty glad she hadn't any. She thought that all little girls were bloodless and dirty, and all little boys were filthy and had black purple marks where their fathers had tried to gouge out their eyes. She thought all women were like the matron who came with a visitor up to the bare room, where we played without toys—the new, dirty, newly-bruised ones of us, and the old, clean, healing ones of us—and said, 'Here, chicks, is a lady who's come to see you. Tell her how happy you are here.' Then Mag's freckled little face, her finger in her mouth, looked up like this. She was always afraid it might be her mother come for her. And the crippled boy jerked himself this way—I used to mimic him, and he'd laugh with the rest of them—over the bare floor. He always hoped for a penny. Sometimes he even got it.

"And the boy with the gouged eye—he would hold his pants up like this. He had just come in, and there was nothing to fit him. And he'd put his other hand over his bad eye and blink up

at her like this. And the littlest boy—oh, ha! ha! ha!—you ought have seen that littlest boy. He was in skirts, an old dress they'd given me to wear the first day I came; there were no pants small enough for him. He'd back up into the corner and hide his face—like this—and peep over his shoulder; he had a squint that way, that made his face so funny. See, it makes you laugh yourself. But his body—my God!—it was blue with welts! And me—I'd put the baby down that'd been left on the door-steps of the Cruelty, and I'd waltz up to the lady, the nice, patronizing, rich lady, with her handkerchief to her nose and her lorgnette to her eyes—see, like this. I knew just what graft would work her. I knew what she wanted there. I'd learned. So I'd make her a curtsy like this, and in the piousest sing-song I'd—"

There was a heavy step out in the hall—it was the policeman! I'd forgot while I was talking. I was back—back in the empty garret, at the top of the Cruelty. I could smell the smell of the poor, the dirty, weak, sick poor. I could taste the porridge in the thick little bowls, like

those in the bear story Molly tells her kid. I could hear the stifled sobs that wise, poor children give—quiet ones, so they'll not be beaten again. I could feel the night, when strange, deserted, tortured babies lie for the first time, each in his small white cot, the new ones waking the old with their cries in a nightmare of what had happened before they got to the Cruelty. I could see the world barred over, as I saw it first through the Cruelty's barred windows, and as I must see it again, now that—

"You see, you don't know it quite all—yet, Mr. Manager!" I spat it out at him, and then walked to the cop, my hands ready for the bracelets.

"But there's one thing I do know!" He's a big fellow but quick on his feet, and in a minute he was up and between me and the cop. "And there isn't a theatrical man in all America that knows it quicker than Fred Obermuller, that can detect it sooner and develop it better. And you've got it, girl, you've got it! . . . Officer, take this for your trouble. I couldn't hold the fellow, after all. Never mind which way he went; I'll call up the office and explain."

He shut the door after the cop, and came back to me. I had fallen into a chair. My knees were weak, and I was trembling all over.

"Have you seen the playlet *Charity* at the Vaudeville?" he roared at me.

I shook my head.

"Well, it's a scene in a foundling asylum. Here's a pass. Go up now and see it. If you hurry you'll get there just in time for that act. Then if you come to me at the office in the morning at ten, I'll give you a chance as one of the Charity girls. Do you want it?"

God, Mag! Do I want it!

V.

Do you remember Lady Patronesses' Day at the Cruelty, Mag? Remember how the place smelt of cleaning ammonia on the bare floors? Remember the black dresses we all wore, and the white aprons with the little bibs, and the oily sweetness of the matron, and how our faces shone and tingled from the soap and the rubbing? Remember it all?

Well, who'd 'a' thought then that Nance Olden ever would make use of it—on the level, too!

Drop the Cruelty, and tell you about the stage? Why, it's bare boards back there, bare as the Cruelty, but oh, there's something that you don't see, but you feel it—something magic that makes you want to pinch yourself to be sure you're awake. I go round there just doped with it; my face, if you could see it, must look like Molly's kid's when she is telling him fairy stories.

I love it, Mag! I love it!

And what do I do? That's what I was trying

to tell you about the Cruelty for. It's in a little act that was made for Lady Gray, that there are four Charity girls on the stage, and I'm one of 'em.

Lady Gray? Why, Mag, how can you ever hope to get on if you don't know who's who? How can you expect me to associate with you if you're so ignorant? Yes—a real Lady, as real as the wife of a Lord can be. Lord Harold Gray's a sure enough Lord, and she's his wife but—but a chippy, just the same; that's what she is, in spite of the Gray emeralds and that great Gray rose diamond she wears on the tiniest chain around her scraggy neck. Do you know, Mag Monahan, that this Lady Harold Gray was just a chorus girl—and a sweet chorus it must have been if she sang there! —when she nabbed Lord Harold?

You'd better keep your eye on Nancy Olden, or first thing you know she'll marry the Czar of Russia—or Tom Dorgan, poor fellow, when he gets out! . . . Well, just the same, Mag, if that white-faced, scrawny little creature can be a Lady, a girl with ten times her brains, and at least half a dozen times her good looks—oh, we're not shy on the stage, Mag, about throwing bouquets at ourselves!

Can she act? Don't be silly, Mag! Can't you see that Obermuller's just hiring her title and playing it in big letters on the bills for all it's worth? She acts the Lady Patroness, come to look at us Charity girls. She comes on, though, looking like a fairy princess. Her dress is just blazing with diamonds. There's the Lady's coronet in her hair. Her thin little arms are banded with gold and diamonds, and on her neck—O Mag, Mag, that rose diamond is the color of rose-leaves in a fountain's jet through which the sun is shining. It's long—long as my thumb—I swear it is, Mag —nearly, and it blazes, oh, it blazes—

Well, it blazes dollars into Obermuller's box all right, for the Gray jewels are advertised in the bill with this one at the head of the list, the star of them all.

You see it's this way: Lord Harold Gray's bankrupt. He's poor as—as Nance Olden. Isn't that funny? But he's got the family jewels all right, to have as long as he lives. Nary a one can he sell, though, for after his death, they go to the next Lord Gray. So he makes 'em make a living for him, and as they can't go on and exhibit them-

selves, Lady Gray sports 'em—and draws down two hundred dollars a week.

Yep—two hundred.

But do you know it isn't the two hundred dollars a week that makes me envy her till I'm sick; it's that rose diamond. If you could only see it, Mag, you'd sympathize with me, and understand why my fingers just itched for it the first night I saw her come on.

'Pon my soul, Mag, the sight of it blazing on her neck dazzled me so that it shut out all the staring audience that first night, and I even forgot to have stage fright.

"What's doped you, Olden?" Obermuller asked when the curtain went down, and we all hurried to the wings.

I was in the black dress with the white-bibbed apron, and I looked up at him still dazed by the shine of that diamond and my longing for it. You'd almost kill with your own hands for a diamond like that, Mag!

"Doped? Why—what didn't I do?" I asked him.

"That's just it," he said, looking at me curiously; but I could feel his disappointment in me.

"You didn't do anything—not a blasted thing more than you were told to do. The world's full of supers that can do that."

For just a minute I forgot the diamond.

"Then—it's a mistake? You were wrong and—and I can't be an actress?"

He threw back his head before he answered, puffing a mouthful of smoke up at the ceiling, as he did the night he caught me. The gesture itself seemed to remind him of what had made him think in the first place he could make an actress of me. For he laughed down at me, and I saw he remembered.

"Well," he said, "we'll wait and see. . . I was mistaken, though, sure enough, about one thing that night."

I looked up at him.

"You're a darn sight prettier than I thought you were. The gold brick you sold me isn't all—"

He put out his hand to touch my chin. I sidestepped, and he turned laughing to the stage.

But he called after me.

"Is a beauty success going to content you, Olden?"

"Well, we'll wait and see," I drawled back at him in his own throaty bass.

Oh, I was drunk, Mag, drunk with thinking about that diamond! I didn't care even to please Obermuller. I just wanted the feel of that diamond in my hand. I wanted it lying on my own neck—the lovely, cool, shining, rosy thing. It's like the sunrise, Mag, that beauty stone. It's just a tiny pool of water blushing. It's—

How to get it! How to get away with it! On what we'd get for that diamond, Tom and I—when his time is up—could live for all our lives and whoop it up besides. We could live in Paris, where great grafters live and grafting pays—where, if you've got wit and fifty thousand dollars, and happen to be a "darn sight prettier," you can just spin the world around your little finger!

But, do you know, even then I couldn't bear to think of selling the pretty thing? It hurt me to think of anybody having it but just Nance Olden.

But I hadn't got it yet.

Gray has a dressing-room to herself. And on her table—which is a big box, open end down—just where the three-sided big mirror can multiply the jewels and make you want 'em three times as

bad, her big russia-leather, silver-mounted box lies open, while she's dressing and undressing. Other times it's locked tight, and his Lordship himself has it tight in his own right hand, or his Lordship's man, Topham, has it just as tight.

How to get that diamond! There was a hard nut for Nance Olden's sharp teeth to crack. I only wanted that—never say I'm greedy, Mag—Gray could keep all the rest of the things—the pigeon in rubies and pearls, the tiara all in diamonds, the chain of pearls, and the blazing rings, and the waist-trimming all of emeralds and diamond stars. But that diamond, that huge rose diamond, I couldn't, I just couldn't let her have it.

And yet I didn't know the first step to take toward getting it, till Beryl Blackburn helped me out. She's one of the Charities, like me—a tall bleached blonde with a pretty, pale face and gold-gray eyes. And, if you'd believe her, there's not a man in the audience, afternoon or evening, that isn't dead-gone on her.

"Guess who's my latest," she said to me this afternoon, while we four Charities stood in the wings waiting. "Topham—old Topham!"

It all got clear to me then in a minute.

"Topham—nothing!" I sneered. "Beryl Bighead, Topham thinks of only one thing—Milady's jewel-box. Don't you fool yourself."

"Oh, does he, Miss! Well, just to prove it, he let me try on the rose diamond last night. There!"

"It's easy to say so but I don't see the proof. He'd lose his job so quick it'd make his head spin if he did it."

"Not if he did, but if they knew he did. You'll not tell?"

"Not me. Why would I? I don't believe it, and I wouldn't expect anybody else to. I don't believe you could get Topham to budge from his chair in Gray's dressing-room if you'd—"

"What'll you bet?"

"I'll bet you the biggest box of chocolate creams at Huyler's."

"Done! I'll send for him to-night, just before Gray and her Lord come, and you see—"

"How'll I see? Where'll I be?"

"Well, you be waiting in the little hall, right off Gray's dressing-room at seven-thirty to-night and —you might as well bring the creams with you."

Catch on, Mag? At seven-thirty in the evening I was waiting; but not in the little hall off Gray's

dressing-room. I hadn't gone home at all after the afternoon performance—you know we play at three, and again at eight-thirty. I had just hidden me away till the rest were gone, and as soon as the coast was clear I got into Gray's dressing-room, pushed aside the chintz curtains of the big box that makes her dressing-table—and waited.

Lord, how the hours dragged! I hadn't had anything to eat since lunch, and it got darker and darker in there, and hot and close and cramped. I put in the time, much as I could, thinking of Tom. The very first thing I'd do after cashing in, would be to get up to Sing Sing to see him. I'm crazy to see him. I'd tell him the news and see if he couldn't bribe a guard, or plan some scheme with me to get out soon.

Afraid—me? What of? If they found me under that box I'd just give 'em the Beryl story about the bet. How do you know they wouldn't believe it? . . . Oh, I don't care, you've got to take chances, Mag Monahan, if you go in for big things. And this was big—huge. Do you know how much that diamond's worth? And do you know how to spend fifty thousand?

I spent it all there—in the box—every penny of

it. When I got tired spending money I dozed a bit and, in my dream, spent it over again. And then I waked and tried to fancy new ways of getting rid of it, but my head ached, and my back ached, and my whole body was so strained and cramped that I was on the point of giving it all up when—that blessed old Topham came in.

He set the big box down with a bang that nearly cracked my head. He turned on the lights, and stood whistling *Tommy Atkins*. And then suddenly there came a soft call, "Topham! Topham!"

I leaned back and bit my fingers till I knew I wouldn't shriek. The Englishman listened a minute. Then the call came again, and Topham creaked to the door and out.

In a twinkling I was out, too, you bet.

Mag! He hadn't opened the box at all! There it stood in the middle of the space framed by the three glasses. I pulled at the lid. Locked! I could have screamed with rage. But the sound of his step outside the door sobered me. He was coming back. In a frantic hurry I turned toward the window which I had unlocked when I came in four hours ago. But I hadn't time to make it. I heard the old fellow's hand on the door, and I

tumbled back into the box in such a rush that the curtains were still waving when he came in.

Slowly he began to place the jewels, one by one, in the order her Ladyship puts them on. We Charity girls had often watched him from the door —he never let one of us put a foot inside. He was method and order itself. He never changed the order in which he lifted the glittering things out, nor the places he put them back in. I put my hand up against the top of the box, tracing the spot where each piece would be lying. Think, Mag, just half an inch between me and quarter of a million!

Oh, I was sore as I lay there! And I wasn't so cock-sure either that I'd get out of it straight. I tried the Beryl story lots of ways on myself, but somehow, every time I fancied myself telling it to Obermuller, it got tangled up and lay dumb and heavy inside of me.

But at least it would be better to appear of my own will before the old Englishman than be discovered by Lord Gray and his Lady. I had my fingers on the curtains, and in another second I'd been out when—

"Miss Beryl Blackburn's compliments, Mr. Top-

ham, and would you step to the door, as there's something most important she wants to tell you."

Oh, I loved every syllable that call-boy spoke! There was a giggle behind his voice, too; old Topham was the butt of every joke. The first call, which had fooled me, must have been from some giddy girl who wanted to guy the old fellow. She had fooled me all right. But this—this one was the real article.

There was a pause—Topham must be looking about to be sure things were safe. Then he creaked to the door and shut it carefully behind him.

It only took a minute, but in that minute—in that minute, Mag, I had the rose diamond clutched safe in my fingers; I was on the top of the big trunk and out of the window.

Oh, the feel of that beautiful thing in my hand! I'd 'a' loved it if it hadn't been worth a penny, but as it was I adored it. I slipped the chain under my collar, and the diamond slid down my neck, and I felt its kiss on my skin. I flew down the black corridor, bumping into scenery and nearly tripping two stage carpenters. I heard Ginger, the call-boy, ahead of me and dodged behind some properties just in time. He went whistling past and I got to the stage door.

I pulled it open tenderly, cautiously, and turned to shut it after me.

And—

And something held it open in spite of me.

No—no, Mag, it wasn't a man. It was a memory. It rose up there and hit me right over the heart—the memory of Nancy Olden's happiness the first time she'd come in this very door, feeling that she actually had a right to use a stage entrance, feeling that she belonged, she—Nancy—to this wonderland of the stage!

You must never tell Tom, Mag, promise! He wouldn't see. He couldn't understand. I couldn't make him know what I felt any more than I'd dare tell him what I did.

I shut the door.

But not behind me. I shut it on the street and—Mag, I shut for ever another door, too; the old door that opens out on Crooked Street. With my hand on my heart, that was beating as though it would burst, I flew back again through the black corridor, through the wings and out to Obermuller's office. With both my hands I ripped open the neck of my dress, and, pulling the chain with that great diamond hanging to it, I broke it with a

tug, and threw the whole thing down on the desk in front of him.

"For God's sake!" I yelled. "Don't make it so easy for me to steal!"

I don't know what happened for a minute. I could see his face change half a dozen ways in as many seconds. He took it up in his fingers at last. It swung there at the end of the slender little broken chain like a great drop of shining water, blushing and sparkling and trembling.

His hands trembled, too, and he looked up at last from the diamond to my face.

"It's worth at least fifty thousand, you know—valued at that."

I didn't answer.

He got up and came over to where I had thrown myself on a bench.

"What's the matter, Olden? Don't I pay you enough?"

"I want to see Tom," I begged. "It's so long since he— He's up at—at—in the country."

"Sing Sing?"

I nodded.

"You poor little devil!"

That finished me. I'm not used to being pitied.

I sobbed and sobbed as though some dam had broken inside of me. You see, Mag, I knew in that minute that I'd been afraid, deathly afraid of Fred Obermuller's face, when it's scornful and sarcastic, and of his voice, when it cuts the flesh of self-conceit off your very bones. And the contrast—well, it was too much for me.

But something came quick to sober me.

It was Gray. She stormed in, followed by Lord Harold and Topham, and half the company.

"The diamond, the rose diamond!" she shrieked. "It's gone! And the carpenters say that new girl Olden came flying from the direction of my dressing-room. I'll hold you responsible—"

"Hush-sh!" Obermuller lifted his hands and nodded over toward me.

"Olden!" she squealed. "Grab her, Topham. I'll bet she stole that diamond, and she can't have got rid of it yet."

Topham jumped toward me, but Obermuller stopped him.

"You'd win only half your bet, my Lady," Obermuller said softly. "She did get hold of the Gray rose, worth fifty thousand dollars, in spite of all your precautions—"

The world seemed to fall away from me. I looked up at him. I couldn't believe he'd go back on me.

"—And she brought it straight to me, as I had asked her to, and promised to raise her salary if she'd win out. For I knew that unless I proved to you it could be stolen, you'd never agree to hire a detective to watch those things, which will get us all into trouble some day. Here! Scoot out o' this. It's nearly time for your number."

He passed the diamond over to her, and they all left the office.

So did I; but he held out his hand as I passed. "It goes—that about a raise for you, Olden. Now earn it."

Isn't he white, Mag—white clean through, that big fellow Obermuller?

VI.

I got into the train, Mag, the happiest girl in all the country. I'd a big basket of things for Tom. I was got up in my Sunday best, for I wanted to make a hit with some fellow with a key up there, who'd make things soft and easy for my Tommy.

I had so much to tell him. I knew just how I'd take off every member of the company to amuse him. I had memorized every joke I'd heard since I'd got behind the curtain—not very hard for me; things always had a way of sticking in my mind. I knew the newest songs in town, and the choruses of all the old ones. I could show him the latest tricks with cards—I'd got those at first hand from Professor Haughwout. You know how great Tom is on tricks. I could explain the disappearing woman mystery, and the mirror cabinet. I knew the clog dance that Dewitt and Daniels do. I had pictures of the trained seals, the great elephant act, Mademoiselle Picotte doing her great tight-

rope dance, and the Brothers Borodini in their pyramid tumbling.

Yes, it was a whole vaudeville show, with refreshments between the acts, that I was taking up to Tom Dorgan. I don't care much for a lot of that truck—funny, isn't it, how you get to turn up your nose at the things you'd have given a finger for once upon a time? But Tom—oh, I'd got everything pat for him—my big, handsome Tom Dorgan in stripes—with his curls all shaved off—ugh!

I'd got just so far in my thoughts, sitting there in the train, when I gave a shiver. I thought for a minute it was at the idea of my Tom with one of those bare, round convict-heads on him, that look like fat skeleton faces. But it wasn't. It was—

Guess, Mag.

Moriway.

Both of us thought the same thing of each other for the first second that our eyes met. I could see that. He thought I was caught at last. And I thought he'd been sharp once too often.

And, Mag, it would be hard to say which of us would have been happier if it had been the truth.

Oh, to meet Moriway, bound sure enough for Sing Sing!

He got up and came over to me, smiling wickedly. He took the seat behind me, and leaning forward, said softly:

"Is Miss Omar engaged to read to some invalid up at Sing Sing? And for how long a term—I should say, engagement?"

I'd got through shivering by then. I was ready for him. I turned and looked at him in that very polite, distant sort o' way Gray uses in her act when the Charity superintendent speaks to her. It's the only decent thing she does; chances are that that's how Lord Gray's mother looks at her.

"You know my sister, Mr.—Mr.—" I asked humbly.

He looked at me, perplexed for just a second.

"Sister be hanged!" he said at last. "I know you, Nat, and I'm glad to my finger-tips that you've got it in the neck, in spite of all your smartness."

"You're altogether wrong, sir," I said very stately, but hurt a bit, you know. "I've often been taken for my sister, but gentlemen usually

apologize when I explain to them. It's hard enough to have a sister who—" I looked up at him tearfully, with my chin a-wabble with sorrow.

He grinned.

"Liars should have good memories," he sneered. "Miss Omar said she was an orphan, you remember, and had not a relative in the world."

"Did she say that? Did Nora say that?" I exclaimed piteously. "Oh, what a little liar she is! I suppose she thought it made her more interesting to be so alone, more appealing to kind-hearted gentlemen like yourself. I hope she wasn't ungrateful to you, too, as she was to that kind Mr. Latimer, before he found her out. And she had such a good position there, too!"

I wanted to look at him, oh, I wanted to! But it was my rôle to sit there with downcast eyes, just the picture of holy grief. I was the good one—the good, shocked sister, and though I wasn't a bit afraid of anything he could do to me, or any game he could put up, I yearned to make him believe me—just because he was so suspicious, so wickedly smart, so sure he was on.

But his very silence sort of told me he almost believed, or that he was laying a trap.

"Will you tell me," he said, "how you—your sister got Latimer to lie for her?"

"Mr. Latimer—lie! Oh, you don't know him. He expected a lady to read to him that very evening. He had never seen her, and when Nora walked into the garden—"

"After getting a skirt somewhere."

"Yes—the housekeeper's, it happened to be her evening out—why, he just naturally supposed Nora was Miss Omar."

"Ah! then her name isn't Omar. What might it be?"

"I'd rather not tell—if you don't mind."

"But when Latimer found out she had the diamonds—he did find out?"

"She confessed to him. Nora's not really so bad a girl as—"

"Very interesting! But it doesn't happen to be Latimer's version. And you say Latimer wouldn't lie."

I got pale—but the paleness was on the inside of me. Think I was going to flinch before a chump like Moriway, even if I had walked straight into his trap?

"It isn't?" I exclaimed.

"No. Latimer's note to Mrs. Kingdon said the diamonds were found in the bell-boy's jacket the thief had left behind him."

"Well! It only shows what a bad habit lying is. Nora must have fibbed to me, for the pure pleasure of fibbing. I'll never dare to trust her again. Do you believe then that she didn't have anything to do with the hotel robbery? I do hope so. It's one less sin on her wicked head. It's hard, having such a girl in the family!" Oh, wasn't I grieved!

He looked me straight in the eye. I looked at him. I was unutterably sad about that tough sister of mine, and I vow I looked holy then, though I never did before and may never again.

"Well, I only saw her in the twilight," he said slowly, watching my face all the time. "You two sisters are certainly miraculously alike."

The train was slowing down, and I got up with my basket. I stood right before him, my full face turned toward him.

"Are we?" I asked simply. "Don't you think it's more the expression than anything else, and the voice? Nora's really much fairer than I am. Good-by."

He watched me as I went out. I felt his eyes on the back of my jacket, and I was tempted to turn at the door and make a face at him. But I knew something better and safer than that. I waited till the train was just pulling out, and then, standing below his window, I motioned to him to raise it.

He did.

"I thought you were going to get out here," I called. "Are you sure you don't belong in Sing Sing, Mr. Moriway?"

I can see his face yet, Mag, and every time I think of it, it makes me nearly die of laughing. He had actually been fooled another time. It was worth the trip up there, to make a guy of him once more.

And whether it was or not, Mag, it was all I got, after all. For—would you believe Tom Dorgan would turn out such a sorehead? He's kicked up such a row ever since he got there, that it's the dark cell for him, and solitary confinement. Think of it—for Tom!

I begged, I bluffed, I cried, I coaxed, but many's the Nance Olden that has played her game against the rules of Sing Sing, and lost. They

wouldn't even let me leave the things for him, or give him a message from me. And back to the station I had to carry the basket, and all the schemes I had to make old Tom Dorgan grin.

All the way back I had him in my mind. He's a tiger—Tom—when he's roused. I could see him, shut up there by himself, with not a soul to talk to, with not a human eye to look into, with not a thing on earth to do—Tom, who's action itself! He never was much of a thinker, and I never saw him read even a newspaper. What would he do to kill the time? Can't you see him there, at bay, back on his haunches, cursing and cursed, alone in the everlasting black silence?

I saw nothing else. Wherever I turned my eyes, that terrible picture was before me. And always it was just on the verge of becoming something else—something worse. He could throttle the world with his bare hands, if it had but one neck, in the mood he must be in now.

It was when I couldn't bear it a moment longer that I set my mind to find something else to think of.

I found it, Mag. Do you know what it was?

It was just three words—of Obermuller's: "Earn it now."

After all, Miss Monahan, this graft of honesty they all preach so much about hasn't anything mysterious in it. All it is, is putting your wits to work according to the rules of the game and not against them. I was driven to it—the thought of big Tom crouching for a spring in the dark cell up yonder sent me whirling out into the thinking place, like the picture of the soul in the big book at Latimer's I read out of. And first thing you know, 'pon honor, Mag, it was as much fun planning how to "earn it now" as any lifting I ever schemed. It's getting the best of people that always charmed me—and here was a way to fool 'em according to law.

So busy I was making it all up, that the train pulled into the station before I knew it. I gave a last thought to that poor old hyena of a Tom, and then put him out of my mind. I had other fish to fry. Straight down to Mother Douty I went with my basket.

"A fool girl, mother, on her way up to Sing Sing, lost her basket, and Nance Olden found it; it ought to be worth a good deal."

She grinned. You couldn't make old Douty believe that the Lord himself wouldn't steal if He got a chance. And she knows the chances that come butting up against Nancy Olden.

Why did I lie to her? Not for practice, I assure you. She'd have beaten me down to the last cent if she thought it was mine, but she always thinks there'll be a find for her in something that's stolen. So I let her think I'd stolen it in the railway station, and we came to terms.

With what she gave me I bought a wig. Mag, I want you some day, when you can get off, to come and see that wig. I shouldn't wonder but you'd recognize it. It's red, of very coarse hair, but a wonderful color, and so long it—yes, it might be your own, Mag Monahan, it's so much like it. I went to the theater and got my Charity rig, took it home, and sat for hours there just looking at 'em both. When evening came I was ready to "earn it now."

You see, Obermuller had given me the whole day to be away, and neither Gray nor the other three Charities expected me back. I had to do it on the sly, you sassy Mag! Yes, it was partly because I love to cheat, but more because I was bound to have

my chance once whether anybody else enjoyed it or not.

I came to the theater in my Charity rig and the wig. It looked as if I'd slept in it, and it came down to the draggled hem of the skirt. All the way there I walked like you, Mag. Once, when a newsboy grinned at me and shouted "Carrots!" I grinned back—your own, old Cruelty grin, Mag. I vow I felt so much like you—as you used to be—that when I lurched out on the stage at last, stumbling over my shoe laces and trying to push the hair out of my eyes, you'd have sworn it was little Mag Monahan making her début in the Cruelty Board room.

Oh, Mag, Mag, you darling Mag! Did you ever hear a whole house, a great big theater full of a peevish vaudeville audience, just rise at you, give one roar of laughter they hadn't expected at all to give, and then settle down to giggle at every move you made?

Girl alive, I just had 'em! They couldn't take their eyes off me. If I squirmed, they howled. If I stood on one foot, scratching the torn leg of my stocking with the other—you know, Mag!—they yelled. If I grinned, they just roared.

Oh, Mag, can't you see? Don't you understand? I was It. The center of the stage I carried round with me—it was just Nancy Olden. And for ten minutes Nancy had nothing to do but to play with 'em. 'Pon my life, Mag, it's just like stealing; the old graft exactly; it's so fascinating, so busy, and risky, except that they play the game with you and pay you and love you to fool 'em.

When the curtain fell it was different. Gray, followed by the Charities, all clean and spick-and-span and—not in it; not even on the edge of it—stormed up to Obermuller standing at the wings.

"I'll quit the show here and now," she squawked. "It's a shame, a beastly shame. How dare you play me such a trick, Fred Obermuller? I never was treated so in my life—to have that dirty little wretch come tumbling on like that, without even so much as your telling me you'd made up all this new business for her! It's indecent, anyway. Why, I lost my cue. There was a gap for a full minute. The whole act was such a ghastly failure that I—"

"That you'd better go out now and make your prettiest bow, Gray. Phew! Listen to the house roar. That's what I call applause. Go on now."

She went.

Me? I didn't say a word. I looked at Obermuller and—and I just did like this. Yes, winked, Mag Monahan. I was so crazily happy I had to, didn't I?

But do you know what he did? Do you know what he did?

Well, I suppose I am screaming and the Troyons will put me out, but—he just—winked—back!

And then Gray came trailing back into the wings, and the shrieking and thumping and whistling out in front just went on—and on—and on—and on. Um! I just listened and loved it—every thump of it. And I stood there like a demure little kitten; or more like Mag Monahan after she'd had a good licking, and was good and quiet. And I never so much as budged till Obermuller said:

"Well, Nance, you have earned it. The gall of you! But it only proves that Fred Obermuller never yet bought a gold brick. Only, let me in on your racket next time. There, go on—take it. It's yours."

Oh, to have Fred Obermuller say things like that to you!

He gave me a bit of a push. 'Twas just a love-pat. I stumbled out on to the stage.

VII.

And that's why, Marguerite de Monahan, I want you to buy in with the madam here. Let 'em keep on calling it Troyon's as much as they want, but you're to be a partner on the money I'll give you. If this fairy story lasts, it'll be your own, Mag—a sort of commission you get on my take-off of you. But if anything happens to the world—if it should go crazy, or get sane, and not love Nancy Olden any more, why, here'll be a place for me, too.

Does it look that way? Divil a bit, you croaker! It looks—it looks—listen and I'll tell you how it looks.

It looks as though Gray and the great Gray rose diamond and the three Charities had all become a bit of background for Nance Olden to play upon.

It looks as though the audience likes the sound of my voice as much almost as I do myself; anyway, as much as it does the sight of me.

It looks as though the press, if you please, had discovered a new stage star, for down comes a little

reporter to interview me—me, Nancy Olden? Think of that, Mag! I receive him all in my Charity rig, and in Obermuller's office, and he asks me silly questions and I tell him a lot of nonsense, but some truths, too, about the Cruelty. Fancy, he didn't know what the Cruelty was! S. P. C. C., he calls it. And all the time we talked a long-haired German artist he had brought with him was sketching Nance Olden in different poses. Isn't that the limit?

What d'ye think Tom Dorgan'd say to see half a page of Nancy Olden in the *X-Ray?* Wouldn't his eyes pop? Poor old Tom! . . . No danger—they won't let him have the papers. . . . My old Tommy!

What is it, Mag? Oh, what was I saying? Yes—yes, how it looks.

Well, it looks as though the Trust—yes, the big and mighty T. T.—short for Theatrical Trust, you innocent—had heard of that same Nance Olden you read about in the papers. For one night last week, when I'd just come off and the house was yelling and shouting behind me, Obermuller meets me in the wings and trots me off to his private office.

"What for?" I asked him on the way.

"You'll find out in a minute. Come on."

I pulled up my stocking and followed. You know I wear it in that act without a garter, and it's always coming down the way yours used to, Mag. Even when it doesn't come down I pull it up, I'm so in the habit of doing it.

A little bit of a man, bald-headed, with a dyspeptic little black mustache turned down at the corners, watched me come in. He grinned at my make-up, and then at me.

"Clever little girl," he says through his nose. "How much do you stick Obermuller for?"

"Clever little man," say I, bold as brass and through my own nose; "none of your business."

"Hi—you, Olden!" roared Obermuller, as though I'd run away and he was trying to get the bit from between my teeth. "Answer the gentleman prettily. Don't you know a representative of the mighty T. T. when you see him? Can't you see the Syndicate aureole about his noble brow? This gentleman, Nance, is the great and only Max Tausig. He humbleth the exalted and uplifteth the lowly—or, if there's more money in it, he gives to him that hath and steals from him that hasn't, but would mighty well like to have. He has no conscience, no

bowels, no heart. But he has got tin and nerve and power to beat the band. In short, and for all practical purposes for one in your profession, Nancy Olden, he's just God. Down on your knees and lick his boots—Trust gods wear boots, patent leathers—and thank him for permitting it, you lucky baggage!"

I looked at the little man; the angry red was just fading from the top of his cocoanut-shaped bald head.

"You always were a fool, Obermuller," he said cordially. "And you were always over-fond of your low-comedian jokes. If you hadn't been so smart with your tongue, you'd had more friends and not so many enemies in—"

"In the heavenly Syndicate, eh? Well, I have lived without—"

"You have lived, but—"

"But where do I expect to go when I die? Good theatrical managers, Nance, when they die as individuals go to Heaven—they get into the Trust. After that they just touch buttons; the Trust does the rest. Bad ones—the kickers—the Fred Obermullers go to—a place where salaries cease from troubling and royalties are at rest. It's a slow

place where—where, in short, there's nothing doing. And only one thing's done—the kicker. It's that place Mr. Tausig thinks I'm bound for. And it's that place he's come to rescue you from, from sheer goodness of heart and a wary eye for all there's in it. Cinch him, Olden, for all the traffic will bear!"

I looked from one to the other—Obermuller, big and savage underneath all his gay talk, I knew him well enough to see that; the little man, his mouth turned down at the corners and a sneer in his eye for the fellow that wasn't clever enough to get in with the push.

"You must not give the young woman the big head, Obermuller. Her own is big enough, I'll bet, as it is. I ain't prepared to make any startling offer to a little girl that's just barely got her nose above the wall. The slightest shake might knock her off altogether, or she mightn't have strength enough in herself to hold on. But we'll give her a chance. And because of what it may lead to, if she works hard, because of the opportunities we can give her, there ain't so much in it in a money way as you might imagine."

Obermuller didn't say anything. His own lips

and his own eyes sneered now, and he winked openly at me, which made the little man hot.

"Blast it!" he twanged. "I mean it. If you've got any notion through my coming down to your dirty little joint that we've set our hearts on having the girl, just get busy thinking something else. She may be worth something to you—measured up against the dubs you've got; but to us—"

"To you, it's not so much your not having her as my having her that—"

"Exactly. It ain't our policy to leave any doubtful cards in the enemy's hands. He can have the bad ones. He couldn't get the good ones. And the doubtful ones, like this girl Olden—"

"Well, that's just where you're mistaken!" Obermuller thrust his hands deep in his pockets and put out that square chin of his like the fighter he is. "'This girl Olden' is anything but doubtful. She's a big card right now if she could be well handled. And the time isn't so far off when, if you get her, you people will be—"

"Just how much is your interest in her worth?" the little man sneered.

Obermuller glared at him, and in the pause I murmured demurely:

"Only a six-year contract."

Mag, you should have seen 'em jump—both of 'em; the little man with vexation, the big one with surprise.

A contract! Me?—Nance Olden! Why, Mag, you innocent, of course I hadn't. Managers don't give six-year contracts to girl-burglars who've never set foot on the stage.

When the little man was gone, Obermuller cornered me.

"What's your game, Olden?" he cried. "You're too deep for me; I throw up my hands. Come; what've you got in that smart little head of yours? Are you holding out for higher stakes? Do you expect him to buy that great six-year contract and divvy the proceeds with me? Because he will—when once they get their eye on you, they'll have you; and to turn up your nose at their offer is just the way to make them itch for you. But how the deuce did you find it out? And where do you get your nerve from, anyway? A little beggar like you to refuse an offer from the T. T. and sit hatching your schemes on your little old 'steen dollars a week! . . . It'll have to be twice 'steen, now, I suppose?"

"All right, just as you say," I laughed. "But why aren't you in the Trust, Fred Obermuller?"

"Why aren't you in society, Nance?"

"Um!—well, because society's prejudiced against lifting, but the Trust isn't. Do you know that's a great graft, Mr. Obermuller—lifting wholesale? Why don't you get in?"

"Because a Trust is a lot of sailors on a raft who keep their places by kicking off the drowning hands that clutch at it. Can you fancy a fellow like Tausig stooping down to help me tenderly on board to divide the pickings?"

"No, but I can fancy you grappling with him till he'd be glad to take you on rather than be pulled off himself."

"You'd be in with the push, would you, Olden, if you were managing?" he asked with a grin.

"I'd be at the top, wherever that was."

"Then why the deuce didn't you jump at Tausig's offer? Were you really crafty enough—"

"I am artiste, Monsieur Obermuller," I gutturaled like Mademoiselle Picotte, who dances on the wire. "I moost have about me those who arre—who arre congeniale—"

"You monkey!" he laughed. "Then, when Tausig comes to buy your contract—"

"We'll tell him to go to thunder."

He laughed. Say, Mag, that big fellow is like a boy when he's pleased. I guess that's what makes it such fun to please him.

"And I, who admired your business sagacity in holding off, Nance!" he said.

"I thought you admired my take-off of Mademoiselle Picotte."

"Well?"

"Well, why don't you make use of it? Take me round to the theaters and let me mimic all the swell actors and actresses. I've got more chance with you than with that Trust gang. They wouldn't give me room to do my own stunt; they'd make me fit into theirs. But you—"

"But me! You think you can wind me round your finger?"

"Not—yet."

He chuckled. I thought I had him going. I saw Nance Olden spending her evenings at the big Broadway theaters, when, just at that minute, Ginger, the call-boy, burst in with a note.

Say, Mag, I wouldn't like to get that man

Obermuller hopping mad at me, and Nancy Olden's no coward, either. But the way he gritted his teeth at that note and the devil in his eyes when he lifted them from it, made me wonder how I'd ever dared be facetious with him.

I got up to go. He'd forgotten me, but he looked up then.

"That was a great suggestion of yours, Olden, to put Lord Gray on to act himself—great!" His voice shook, he was so angry.

"Well!" I snapped. I wasn't going to let him see that a big man raging could bluff Nance Olden.

What did he mean? Why—just this: there was Lord Harold Gray, the real Lord behind the scenes, bringing the Lady who was really only a chorus girl to the show in his automobile; helping her dress like a maid; holding her box of jewels as he tagged after her like a big Newfoundland; smoking his one cigarette solemnly and admiringly while she was on the stage; poking after her like a tame bear. He's a funny fellow, that Lord Harold. He's a Tom Dorgan, with the brains and the graft and—and the brute, too, Mag, washed out of him; a Tom Dorgan that's been kept dressed in swagger clothes all his life and living at top-notch

—a big, clean, handsome, stupid, good-natured, overgrown boy.

Yes, I'm coming to it. When I'd seen him go tagging after her chippy Ladyship behind the scenes long enough, I told Obermuller one day that it was absurd to send the mock Lady out on the boards and keep the live Lord hidden behind. He jumped at the idea, and they rigged up a little act for the two—the Lord and the Lady. Gray was furious when she heard of it—their making use of her Lord in such a way—but Lord Harold just swallowed his big Adam's apple with a gulp or two, and said:

"'Pon honor, it's a blawsted scheme, you know; but I'm jolly sure I'd make a bleddy ass of myself. I cawn't act, you know."

The ninny! You know he thinks Gray really can.

But Obermuller explained to him that he needn't act—just be himself out behind the wings, and lo! Lord Harold was "chawmed."

And Gray?

Why, she gave in at last; pretended to, anyway—sliding out of the Charity sketch, and rehearsing the thing with him, and all that. And—and

do you know what she did, Mag? (Nance Olden may be pretty mean, but she wouldn't do a trick like that.) She waited till ten minutes before time for the thing to be put on and then threw a fit.

"She's so ill, her delicate Ladyship! So ill she just can't go on this evening! Wonder how long she thinks such an excuse will keep Lord Harold off when I want him on!" growled Obermuller, throwing her note over to me. He'd have liked to throw it at me if it'd been heavy enough to hurt; he was so thumping mad.

You see, there it was on the program:

THE CLEVER SKETCH ENTITLED

THEATRICAL ARISTOCRACY.

The Duke of Portmanteau....Lord Harold Gray.
The Duchess.....Lady Gray.

The celebrated Gray jewels, including the great Rose Diamond, will be worn by Lady Gray in this number.

* * * * * * * * * *

No wonder Obermuller was raging. I looked at him. You don't like to tackle a fellow like that

when he's dancing hot. And yet you ache to help him and—yes, yourself.

"Lord Harold's here yet, and the jewels?" I asked.

He gave a short nod. He was thinking. But so was I.

"Then all he wants is a Lady?"

"That's all," he said sarcastically.

"Well, what's the matter with me?"

He gasped.

"There's nothing the matter with your nerve, Olden."

"Thank you, so much." It was the way Gray says it when she tries to have an English accent. "Dress me up, Fred Obermuller, in Gray's new silk gown and the Gray jewels, and you'd never—"

"I'd never set eyes on you again."

"You'd never know, if you were in the audience, that it wasn't Gray herself. I can take her off to the life, and if the prompter'll stand by—"

He looked at me for a full minute.

"Try it, Olden," he said.

I did. I flew to Gray's dressing-room. She'd gone home deathly ill, of course. They gave me the best seamstress in the place. She let out the waist

LORD
HAROLD
GRAY
—
LADY
GRAY

a bit and pulled over the lace to cover it. I got into that mass of silk and lace—oh, silk on silk, and Nance Olden inside! Beryl Blackburn did my hair, and Grace Weston put on my slippers. Topham, himself, hung me with those gorgeous shining diamonds and pearls and emeralds, till I felt like an idol loaded with booty. There were so many standing round me, rigging me up, that I didn't get a glimpse of the mirror till the second before Ginger called me. But in that second—in that second, Mag Monahan, I saw a fairy with blazing cheeks and shining eyes, with a diamond coronet in her brown hair, puffed high, and pearls on her bare neck and arms, and emeralds over the waist, and rubies and pearls on her fingers, and sprays of diamonds like frost on the lace of her skirt, and diamond buckles on her very slippers, and the rose diamond, like a sun, outshining all the rest; and—and, Mag, it was me!

How did it go? Well, wouldn't it make you think you were a Lady, sure enough, if you couldn't move without that lace train billowing after you; without being dazzled with diamond-shine; without a truly Lord tagging after you?

He kept his head, Lord Harold did—even if it

is a mutton-head. That helped me at first. He was so cold, so stupid, so slow, so good-tempered—so just himself. And after the first plunge—

I tell you, Mag Monahan, there's one thing that's stronger than wine to a woman—it's being beautiful. Oh! And I was beautiful. I knew it before I got that quick hush, with the full applause after it. And because I was beautiful, I got saucy, and then calm, and then I caught Fred. Obermuller's voice—he had taken the book from the prompter and stood there himself—and after that it was easy sailing.

He was there yet when the act was over, and I trailed out, followed by my Lord. He let the prompt-book fall from his hands and reached them both out to me.

I flirted my jeweled fan at him and swept him a courtesy.

Cool? No, I wasn't. Not a bit of it. He was daffy with the sight of me in all that glory, and I knew it.

"Nance," he whispered, "you wonderful girl, if I didn't know about that little thief up at the Bronsonia I'd—I'd marry you alive, just for the fun of piling pretty things on you."

"The deuce you would!" I sailed past him, with Topham and my Lord in my wake.

They didn't leave me till they'd stripped me clean. I felt like a Christmas tree the day after. But, somehow, I didn't care.

VIII.

Is that you, Mag? Well, it's about time you came home to look after me. Fine chaperon you make, Miss Monahan! Why, didn't I tell you the very day we took this flat what a chaperon was, and that you'd have to be mine? Imagine Nancy Olden without a chaperon— Shocking!

No, 'tisn't late. Sit down, Maggie, there, and let me get the stool and talk to you. Think of us two—Cruelty girls, both of us—two mangy kittens deserted by the old cats in a city's alleys, and left mewing with cold and hunger and dirt, out in the wet—think of us two in our own flat, Mag!

I say, it makes me proud of us! There are times when I look at every stick of furniture we own, and I try to pretend to it all that I'm used to a decent roof over my head, and a dining-room, kitchen, parlor, bedroom and bath. Oh, and I forgot the telephone the other tenant left here till its lease is up. But at other times I stand here in the middle of it and cry out to it, in my heart:

"Look at me, Nancy Olden, a householder, a rent-payer, the head of the family, even if it's only a family of two and the other one Mag! Look at me, with my name in the directory, a-paying milk bills and meat bills and bread bills! Look at me with a place of my own, where nobody's right's greater than my own; where no one has a right but me and Mag; a place where—where there's nothing to hide from the police!"

There's the rub, Mag, as Hamlet says—(I went to see it the other night, so that I could take off the Ophelia—she used to be a good mimic herself, before she tried to be a leading lady.) It spoils you, this sense of safeness that goes with the honesty graft. You lose the quickness of the hunter and the nerve of the hunted. And—worse—you lose your taste for the old risky life. You grow proud and fat, and you love every stick in the dear, quiet little place that's your home—your own home. You love it so that you'd be ashamed to sneak round where it could see you—you who'd always walked upright before it with the step of the mistress; with nothing in the world to be ashamed of; nothing to prevent your staring each honest dish-pan in the face!

And, Mag, you try—if you're me—to fit Tom Dorgan in here—Tom Dorgan in stripes and savage sulks still—all these months—kept away from the world, even the world behind bars! Maggie, don't you wish Tom was a ventriloquist or—or an acrobat or—but this isn't what I had to tell you.

Do you know what a society entertainer is, Miss Monahan? No? Well, look at me. Yes, I'm one. Miss Nance Olden, whose services are worth fifty dollars a night—at least, they were one night.

Ginger brought me the note that made me a society entertainer. It was from a Mrs. Paul B. Gates, who had been "charmed by your clever impersonations, Miss Olden, and write to know if you have the leisure to entertain some friends at my house on Thursday of this week."

Had I the leisure—well, rather! I showed the note to Gray, just to make her jealous. (Oh, yes, she goes on all right in the act with Lord Harold every night. Catch her letting me wear those things of hers twice!) Well, she just turned up her nose.

"Of course, you won't accept?" she said.

"Of course, I will."

"Oh! I only thought you'd feel as I should about appearing before a lot of snobs, who'll treat you like a servant and—"

"Who'll do nothing of the sort and who'll pay you well for it," put in Obermuller. He had come up and was reading the note I had handed to him. "You just say yes, Nance," he went on, after Gray had bounced off to her dressing-room. "It isn't such a bad graft and—and this is just between us two, mind—that little beggar, Tausig, has begun his tricks since you turned his offer down. They can make things hot for me, and if they do, it won't be so bad for you to go in for this sort of thing—unless you go over to the Trust—"

I shook my head.

"Well, this thing will be an ad for you, besides, —if the papers can be got to notice it. They're coy with their notices, confound them, since Tausig let them know that big Trust ads don't appear in the same papers that boom anti-Trust shows!"

"How long are you going to stand it, Mr. O ?"

"Just as long as I can't help myself; not a minute longer."

"There ought to be a way—some way—"

"Yes, there ought, but there isn't. They've got

things down to a fine point, and the fellow they don't fear has got to fear them. . . . I'll put your number early to-night, so that you can get off by nine. Good luck, Nance."

At nine, then, behold Nancy Olden in her white muslin dress, long-sleeved and high-necked, and just to her shoe-tops, with a big white muslin sash around her waist. Oh, she's no baby, is Nance, but she looks like one in this rig with her short hair —or rather, like a school-girl; which makes the stunts she does in mimicking the corkers of the profession all the more surprising.

"We're just a little party," said Mrs. Paul Gates, coming into the bedroom where I was taking off my wraps. "And I'm so glad you could come, for my principal guest, Mr. Latimer, is an invalid, who used to love the theaters, but hasn't been to one since his attack many years ago. I count on your giving him, in a way, a condensed history in action of what is going on on the stage."

I told her I would. But I didn't just know what I was saying. Think of Latimer there, Maggie, and think of our last meeting! It made me tremble. Not that I fancied for a moment he'd betray me. The man that helps you twice don't

hurt you the third time. No, it wasn't that; it was only that I longed to do well—well before him, so that—

And then I found myself in an alcove off the parlors, separated from them by heavy curtains. It was such a pretty little red bower. Right behind me was the red of the Turkish drapery of a cozy corner, and just as I took my place under the great chandelier, the servants pulled the curtains apart and the lights went out in the parlors.

In that minute I got it, Mag—yes, stage fright. Got it bad. I suppose it was coming to me, but Lordy! I hadn't ever known before what it was. I could see the black of the men's clothes in the long parlors in front of me, and the white of the women's necks and arms. There were soft ends of talk trailing after the first silence, and everything was so strange that I seemed to hear two men's voices which sounded familiar—Latimer's silken voice, and another, a heavy, coarse bass, that was the last to be quieted.

I fancied that when that last voice should stop I could begin, but all at once my mind seemed to turn a somersault, and, instead of looking out upon them, I seemed to be looking in on myself—to see

a white-faced little girl in a white dress, standing alone under a blaze of light in a glare of red, gazing fearfully at this queer, new audience.

Fail? Me? Not Nancy, Maggie. I just took me by the shoulders.

"Nancy Olden, you little thief!" I cried to me inside of me. "How dare you! I'd rather you'd steal the silver on this woman's dressing-table than cheat her out of what she expects and what's coming to her."

Nance really didn't dare. So she began.

The first one was bad. I gave 'em Duse's Francesca. You've never heard the wailing music in that woman's voice when she says:

> "There is no escape, Smaragdi. You have said it;
> The shadow is a glass to me, and God
> Lets me be lost."

I gave them Duse just to show them how swell I was myself; which shows what a ninny I was. The thing the world loves is the opposite of what it is. The pat—pat—pat of their gloves came in to me when I got through. They were too polite to hiss. But it wasn't necessary. I was hissing myself. Inside of me there was a long, nasty hiss-ss-ss!

I couldn't bear it. I couldn't bear to be a failure with Latimer listening, though out there in that queer half-light I couldn't see him at all, but could only make out the couch where I knew he must be lying.

I just jumped into something else to retrieve myself. I can do Carter's Du Barry to the Queen's taste, Maggie. That rotten voice of hers, like Mother Douty's, but stronger and surer; that rocky old face pretending to look young and beautiful inside that talented red hair of hers; that whining "Denny! Denny!" she squawks out every other minute. Oh, I can do Du Barry all right!

They thought I could, too, those black and white shadows out there on the other side of the velvet curtains. But I cared less for what they thought than for the fact that I had drowned that sputtering hiss-ss-ss inside of me, and that Latimer was among them.

I gave them Warfield, then; I was always good at taking off the sheenies in the alley behind the Cruelty—remember? I gave them that little pinch-nosed Maude Adams, and dry, corking little Mrs. Fiske, and Henry Miller when he smooths

down his white breeches lovingly and sings *Sally in our Alley*, and strutting old Mansfield, and—

Say, isn't it funny, Mag, that I've seen 'em all and know all they can do? They've been my college education, that crowd. Not a bad one, either, when you come to think of what I wanted from it.

They pulled the curtains down at the end and I went back to the bedroom. I had my hat and jacket on when Mrs. Gates and some of the younger ladies came to see me there, but I caught no glimpse of Latimer. You'd think—wouldn't you—that he'd have made an opportunity to say just one nice word to me in that easy, soft voice of his? I tried to believe that perhaps he hadn't really seen me, lying down, as he must have been, or that he hadn't recognized me, but I knew that I couldn't make myself believe that; and the lack of just that word from him spoiled all my satisfaction with myself, and I walked out with Mrs. Gates through the hall and past the dining-room feeling as hurt as though I'd deserved that a man like Latimer should notice me.

The dining-room was all lighted, but empty—the colored, shaded candlesticks glowing down on the cut glass and silver, on delicate china and flowers.

The ladies and gentlemen hadn't come out to supper yet; at least, only one was there. He was standing with his back to me, before the sideboard, pouring out a glass of something from a decanter. He turned at the rustle of my starched skirt, and, as I passed the door, he saw me. I saw him, too, and hurried away.

Yes, I knew him. Just you wait.

I got home here earlier than I'd expected, and I'd just got off my hat and jacket and put away that snug little check when there came a ring at the bell.

I thought it was you, Mag—that you'd forgotten your key. I was so sure of it that I pulled the door open wide with a flourish and—

And admitted—Edward!

Yes, Edward, husband of the Dowager. The same red-faced, big-necked old fellow, husky-voiced with whisky now, just as he was before. He must have been keeping it up steadily ever since the day out in the country when Tom lifted his watch. It'll take more than one lost watch to cure Edward.

"I—followed you home, Miss Murieson," he said, grabbing me by the hand and pushing the

door closed behind him. "Or is it Miss Murieson? Which is your stage name, and which your real one? And have you really learned to remember it? For my part, any old name will smell as sweet, now that I'm close to the rose."

I jerked my hand away from him.

"I didn't ask you to call," I said, haughty as the Dowager herself was when first I saw her in her gorgeous parlor, the Bishop's card in her hand.

"No, I noticed that," he roared jovially. "You skinned out the front door the moment you saw me. All that was left to me was to skin after."

"Why?"

"Why!" He slapped his leg as though he'd heard the best joke in the world. "To renew our acquaintance, of course. To ask you if you wouldn't like me to buy you a red coat and hat like the one you left behind you that day over in Philadelphia, when you cut your visit so short. To insist upon my privilege of relationship. To call that wink you gave me in the hall that day, you little devil. Now, don't look at me like that. I say, let's be friends; won't you?"

"Not for a red coat trimmed with chinchilla," I cried.

He got between me and the door.

"Prices gone up?" he inquired pleasantly. "Who's bulling the stock?"

"Never you mind, so long as his name isn't Ramsay."

"But why shouldn't his name be Ramsay?" he cooed.

"Just because it isn't. I'm expecting a friend. Hadn't you better go home to Mrs. Dowager Diamonds?"

"Bully! Is that what you call her? No, I'll stay and meet your friend."

"Better not."

"Oh, I'm not afraid. Does he know as much about you as I do?"

"More."

"About your weakness for other girls' coats?"

"Yes."

You do know it all, don't you? And yet you care for me, Maggie Monahan!

I retreated before him into the dining-room. What in the world to do to get rid of him!

"I think you'd better go home, Mr. Ramsay," I said again, decidedly. "If you don't, I'll have to call the janitor to put you out."

"Call, sweetheart. He'll put you out with me; for I'll tell him a thing or two about you, and we'll go and find a better place than this. Stock can't be quoted so high, after all, if this is the best prospectus your friend can put up. . . . Why don't you call?"

I looked at him. I was thinking.

"Well?" he demanded.

"I've changed my mind."

Oh, Mag, Mag, did you ever see the man—ugly as a cannibal he may be and old as the cannibal's great-grandfather—that couldn't be persuaded he was a lady-killer?

His manner changed altogether. He plumped down on the lounge and patted the place beside him invitingly, giving me a wink that was deadly.

"But, Mrs. Dowager!" I exclaimed coquettishly.

"Oh, that's all right, little one! She hasn't even missed me yet. When she's playing Bridge she forgets even to be jealous."

"Playing Bridge," I murmured sweetly, "'way off in Philadelphia, while you, you naughty man—"

Oh, he loved that!

"Not so naughty as—as I'd like to be," he bellowed, heavily witty. "And she isn't 'way off in Philadelphia either. She's just round the corner at Mrs. Gates', and—what's the matter?"

"Nothing—nothing. Did she recognize me?"

"Oh, that's what scared you, is it? She didn't recognize you. Neither did I, till I got that second glimpse of you with your hat and jacket on. But even if she had—ho! ho! ho! I say; do you know, you couldn't convince the Bishop and Henrietta, if you'd talk till doomsday, that that red coat and hat we advertised weren't taken by a little girl that was daffy. Fact; I swear it! They admit you took the coat, you little witch, but it was when you were out of your mind—of course—of course! 'The very fact that she left the coat behind her and took nothing else from the house shows a mind diseased,' insisted Henrietta. Of course—of course! 'And her coming for no reason at all to your house,' adds the Bishop. . . . Say, what was the reason?"

Maggie, I'll tell you a hard thing: it isn't when people think worse of you than you are, but better, that you feel most uncomfortable. I got pale and

sick inside of me at the thought of my poor little Bishop. I loved him for believing me straight and—

"I've been dying of curiosity to know what was in your wise little head that day," he went on. "Oh, it was wise all right; that wink you gave me was perfectly sane; there was method in that madness of yours."

"I will tell you, Mr. Ramsay," I said sweetly, "at supper."

"Supper!"

"Yes, the supper you're going to get for me."

His bellowing laughter filled the place. Maggie, our little flat and our few things don't go well with sounds like that.

"Oh, you're all alike, you women!" he roared. "All right, supper it is. Where shall we go—Rector's?"

I pouted.

"It's so much more cozy right here," I said. "I'll telephone. There's Brophy's, just round the corner, and they send in the loveliest things."

"Oh, they do! Well, tell 'em to begin sending."

I thought he'd follow me out in the hall to the 'phone, but he was having some trouble in pulling

out his purse—to count out his money, I suppose. I got Central and asked for the number. Oh, yes, I knew it all right; I had called up that same number once, already, to-day. Brophy's? Why, Maggie Monahan, you ought to know there's no Brophy's. At least none that I ever heard about.

With my hand over the mouthpiece, so that nobody heard but Edward, I ordered a supper fit for a king—or a chorus girl! What didn't I order! Champagne, broiled lobster, crab meat, stuffed pimentoes, kirschkaffee—everything I'd ever heard Beryl Blackburn tell about.

"Say, say," interrupted Edward, coming out after me. "That's enough of that stuff. Tell him to send in a Scotch and soda and—what—"

For at that moment the connection was made and I cut in sweetly with:

"Mrs. Edward Ramsay?—just a minute."

Mag, you should have seen the man's face! It was red, it was white; it was furious, it was frightened.

I put my hand a moment over the mouthpiece and turned on him then. "I've got her on the 'phone at Mrs. Gates' house. Shall I tell your wife where you are, Edward? . . . Just a

moment, Mrs. Ramsay, hold the wire; some one wants to speak with you."

"You little devil!" His voice was thick with rage.

"Yes, you called me that some time ago, but not in that tone. Quick, now—the door or . . . Waiting, Mrs. Ramsay?"

He moved toward the door.

"How'll I know you won't tell her when I'm gone?" he growled.

"Merely by my saying that I won't," I answered curtly. "You're in no position to dictate terms; I am."

But I could, without leaving the 'phone, latch the chain on the door behind him, leaving it half open. So he must have heard the rest.

"Yes, Mrs. Ramsay, waiting?" I croaked like the driest kind of hello-girl. "I was mistaken. It was a message left to be delivered to you—not some one wanting to speak with you. Who am I? Why, this is Central. Here is the message: 'Will be with you in half an hour.' Signed 'Edward.' . . . Yes, that's right. Thank you. Good night."

I hung up, gave the door a touch that shut it in his face and went back into the dining-room to

throw open the windows. The place smelled of alcohol; the moral atmosphere left behind by that bad old man sickened me.

I leaned out and looked at the stars and tried to think of something sweet and wholesome and strengthening.

"Ah, Nance," I cried to myself with a sob—I had pretended to take it lightly enough when he was here, but now—"if you had heard of a girl who, like yourself this evening, unexpectedly met two men she had known, and the good man ignored her and the bad one followed her—oh, Nancy—what sort of girl would you think she was at heart? What sort of hope could you imagine her treasuring for her own future? And what sort of significance would you attach to—"

And just then the bell rang again.

This time I was sure it was you. And, O Maggie, I ran to the door eager for the touch of your hand and the look in your eyes. I was afraid to be alone with my own thoughts. I was afraid of the conclusion to which they were leading me. Maggie, if ever a girl needed comfort and encouragement and heartening, I did then.

And I got it, dear.

For there was a man at the door, with a great basket of azaleas—pale, pink earth-stars they are, the sweet, innocent things—and a letter for me. Here it is. Let me read it to you.

"My dear Miss Omar:

Once on a time there was a Luckless Pot, marred in the making, that had the luck to be of service to a Pipkin.

It was a saucy Pipkin, though a very winning one, and it had all the health and strength the poor Pot lacked—physically. Morally—morally, that young Pipkin was in a most unwholesome condition. Already its fair, smooth surface was scratched and fouled. It was unmindful of the treasure of good it contained, and its responsibility to keep that good intact. And it seemed destined to crash itself to pieces among pots of baser metal.

What the Luckless Pot did was little—being ignorant of the art by which diamonds may be attained easily and honestly—but it gave the little Pipkin a chance.

What the Pipkin did with that chance the Pot learned to-night, with such pleasure and satisfac-

tion as made it impossible for him not to share it with her. So while he sent Burnett out to the conservatory to cut azaleas, he wrote her a note to try to convey to her what he felt when, in that nicely polished, neatly decorated and self-respecting Vessel on exhibition in Mrs. Gates' red room, he recognized the poor little Pipkin of other days.

The Pot, as you know, was a sort of stranded bit of clay that had never filled the use for which pots are created. He had little human to interest him. The fate of the Pipkin, therefore, he had often pondered on; and, in spite of improbabilities, had had faith in a certain quality of brave sincerity the little thing showed; a quality that shone through acquired faults like a star in a murky sky.

This justification of his faith in the Pipkin may seem a small matter to make so much of. And yet the Pot—that sleeps not well o' nights, as is the case with damaged pots—will take to bed with him to-night a pretty, pleasant thought due just to this.

But do not think the Pot an idealist. If he were, he might have been tempted to mistake the Pipkin for a statelier, more pretentious Vessel—a Vase, say, all graceful curves and embossed sides,

but shallow, perhaps, possibly lacking breadth. No, the Pipkin is a pipkin, made of common clay—even though it has the uncommon sweetness and strength to overcome the tendencies of clay—and fashioned for those common uses of life, deprivation of which to anything that comes from the Potter's hands is the most enduring, the most uncommon sorrow.

O pretty little Pipkin, thank the Potter, who made you as you are, as you will be—a thing that can cheer and stay men's souls by ministering to the human needs of them. For you, be sure, the Potter's 'a good fellow and 'twill all be well.'

For the Pot—he sails shortly, or rather, he is to be carted abroad by some optimistic friends whose hopes he does not share—to a celebrated repair shop for damaged pots. Whether he shall return, patched and mended into temporary semblance of a useful Vessel; whether he shall continue to be merely the same old Luckless Pot, or whether he shall return at all, O Pipkin, does not matter much.

But it has been well that, before we two behind the veil had passed, we met again, and you left me such a fragrant memory. LATIMER."

* * * * * * * * * *

O Maggie, Maggie, some day I hope to see that man and tell him how sorely the Pipkin needed the Pot's letter!

IX.

It's all come so quick, Maggie, and it was over so soon that I hardly remember the beginning.

Nobody on earth could have expected it less than I, when I came off in the afternoon. I don't know what I was thinking of as I came into my dressing-room, that used to be Gray's—the sight of him seemed to cut me off from myself as with a knife—but it wasn't of him.

It may have been that I was chuckling to myself at the thought of Nancy Olden with a dressing-room all to herself. I can't ever quite get used to that, you know, though I sail around there with all the airs of the leading lady. Sometimes I see a twinkle in Fred Obermuller's eye when I catch him watching me, and goodness knows he's been glum enough of late, but it wasn't—

Yes, I'm going to tell you, but—it's rattled me a bit, Maggie. I'm so—so sorry, and a little—oh, just a little, little bit glad!

I'd slammed the door behind me—the old place is out of repair and the door won't shut except with a bang—and I had just squatted down on the floor to unbutton my high shoes, when I noticed the chintz curtains in front of the high dressing-box waver. They must have moved just like that when I was behind them months—it seems years—ago. But, you see, Topham had never served an apprenticeship behind curtains, so he didn't suspect.

"Lordy, Nancy," I laughed to myself, "some one thinks you've got a rose diamond and—"

And at that moment he parted the curtains and came out.

Yes—Tom—Tom Dorgan.

My heart came beating up to my throat and then, just as I thought I should choke, it slid down to my boots, sickening me. I didn't say a word. I sat there, my foot in my lap, staring at him.

Oh, Maggie-girl, it isn't good to get your first glimpse after all these months of the man you love crouched like a big bull in a small space, poking his close-cropped black head out like a turtle that's not sure something won't be thrown at it, and then dragging his big bulk out and standing over you. He used to be trim—Tom—and taut, but in those

shapeless things, the old trousers, the dirty white shirt, and the vest too big for him—

"Well," he said, "why don't you say something?"

Tom's voice—Mag, do you remember, the merry Irish boy's voice, with its chuckles like a brook gurgling as it runs?

No—'tisn't the same voice. It's—it's changed, Maggie. It's heavy and—and coarse—and—brutal. That's what it is. It sounds like—like the knout, like—

"Nance—what in hell's—"

"I think I'm—frightened, Tom."

"Oh, the ladyfied airs of her! Ain't you going to faint, Miss Olden?"

I got up.

"No—no. Sit down, Tom. Tell me about it. How—how did you get here?"

He went to the door, opened it a bit and looked out cautiously. Mag—Mag—it hurt me—that. Why, do you suppose?

"You're sure nobody'll come in?" he asked.

I turned the key in the lock, forgetting that it didn't really lock.

"Oh, yes, I'm sure," I said. "Why?"

"Why! You have got slow. Just because I

didn't say good-by to them fellows up at the Pen, and—"

"Oh! You've escaped!"

"That's what. First jail-break in fifteen years. What d'ye think of your Tommy, old girl, eh? Ain't he the gamest? Ain't you proud of him?"

My God, Mag! Proud of him. He didn't know—he couldn't see—himself. He, shut in like a wild beast, couldn't see what this year has done for him. Oh, the change—the change in him! My boy Tommy, with the gay, gallus manner, and the pretty, jolly brogue, and the laughing mouth under his brown mustache. And this man—his face is old, Mag, old—oh!—and hard—and—and tough, cheap and tough. There's something in his eyes now and about his shaven mouth—oh, Maggie, Maggie!

"Look here, Nance." He caught me by the shoulders, knocking up my chin so that he could look down squarely at me. "What's your graft? What's it to be between us? What've ye been doing all this time? Out with it! I want to know."

I shook myself free and faced him.

"I've been—Tom Dorgan, I've been to hear the greatest actors and actresses in the world say and

do the finest things in the world. I've watched princesses and kings—even if they're only stage ones. I've read a new book every night—a great picture book, in which the pictures move and speak —that's the stage, Tom Dorgan. Much of it wasn't true, but a girl who's been brought up by the Cruelty doesn't have to be told what's true and what's false. I've met these people and lived with them—as one does who thinks the same thoughts and feels what others feel. I know the world now, Tom Dorgan, the real world of men and women—not the little world of crooks, nor yet the littler one of fairy stories. I've got a glimpse, too, of that other world where all the scheming and lying and cheating is changed as if by magic into something that deceives all right, but doesn't hurt. It's the world of art and artists, Tom Dorgan, where people paint their lies, or write them, or act them; where they lift money all right from men's pockets, but lift their souls and their lives, too, away from the things that trouble and bore and—and degrade.

"You needn't sneer; it's made a different Nance out of me, Tom Dorgan. And, oh, but I'm sorry for the pert little beggar we both knew that lied

and stole and hid and rap and skulked! She was like a poor little ignorant traveler in a great country where she'd sized up the world from the few fool crooks she was thrown in with. She—"

"Aw, cut it!"

"Tom—does—doesn't it mean anything to you? Can't it mean lots to both of us now that—"

"Cut it, I tell you! Think I killed one guard and beat the other till I'd broke every bone in his body to come here and listen to such guff? You've been having a high old time, eh, and you never give a thought to me up there! I might 'a' rotted in that black hole for all you'd care, you—"

"Don't! I did, Tom; I did." I was shivering at the name, but I couldn't bear his thinking that way of me. "I went up once, but they wouldn't let me see you. I wrote you, but they sent back the letters. Mag went up, too, but had to come back. And that time I brought you—"

My voice trailed off. In that minute I saw myself on the way up to Sing Sing with the basket and all my hopes and all my schemes for amusing him.

And this is what I'd have seen if they'd let me in —this big, gruff, murdering beast!

Oh, yes—yes—beast is what he is, and it didn't

make him look it less that he believed me and—and began to think of me in a different way.

"I thought you wouldn't go back on a feller, Nance. That's why I come straight to you. It was my game to have you hide me for a day or two, till you could make a strike somewhere and we'd light out together. How're ye fixed? Pretty smart, eh? You look it, my girl, you look—My eye, Nance, you look good enough to eat, and I'm hungry for you!"

Maggie, if I'd had to die for it I couldn't have moved then. You'd think a man would know when the woman he's holding in his arms is fainting—sick at the touch of him. A woman would. It wasn't my Tom that I'd known, that I'd worked with and played with and— It was a great brute, whose mouth—who had no eyes, no ears, no senses but—ah! . . .

He laughed when I broke away from him at last. He laughed! And I knew then I'd have to tell him straight in words.

"Tom," I gasped, "you can have all I've got; and it's plenty to get you out of the way. But—but you can't have—me—any more. That's—done!"

Oh, the beast in his face! It must have looked like that when the guard got his last glimpse of it.

"You're kiddin' me?" he growled.

I shook my head.

Then he ripped it out. Said the worst he could and ended with a curse! The blood boiled in me. The old Nance never stood that; she used to sneer at other women who did.

"Get out of here!" I cried. "Go—go, Tom Dorgan. I'll send every cent I've got to you to Mother Douty's within two hours, but don't you dare—"

"Don't *you* dare, you she-devil! Just make up your mind to drop these newfangled airs, and mighty quick. I tell you you'll come with me 'cause I need you and I want you, and I want you now. And I'll keep you when once I get you again. We'll hang together. No more o' this one-sided lay-out for me, where you get all the soft and it's me for the hard. You belong to me. Yes, you do. Just think back a bit, Nance Olden, and remember the kind of customer I am. If you've forgot, just let me remind you that what I know would put you behind bars, my lady, and it shall, I swear, if I've got to go to the Chair for it!"

Tom! It was Tom talking that way to me. I couldn't bear it. I made a rush for the door.

He got there, too, and catching me by the shoulder, he lifted his fist.

But it never fell, Mag. I think I could kill a man who struck me. But just as I shut my eyes and shivered away from him, while I waited for the blow, a knock came at the door and Fred Obermuller walked in.

"Eh? Oh! Excuse me. I didn't know there was anybody else. Nance, your face is ghastly. . . . What's up?" he said sharply.

He looked from me to Tom—Tom, standing off there ready to spring on him, to dart past him, to fly out of the window—ready for anything; only waiting to know what the thing was to be.

My senses came back to me then. The sight of Obermuller, with those keen, quick eyes behind his glasses, his strong, square chin, and the whole poise of his head and body that makes men wait to hear what he has to say; the knowledge that that man was my friend, mine—Nancy Olden's—lifted me out of the mud I'd sunk back in, and put my feet again on a level with his.

"Tom," I said slowly, "Mr. Obermuller is a

friend of mine. No—listen! What we've been talking about is settled. Don't bring it up again. It doesn't interest him and it can't change me; I swear to you, it can't; nothing can. I'm going to ask Mr. Obermuller to help you without telling him just what the scrape is, and—and I'm going to be sure that he'll do it just because he—"

"Because you've taken up with him, have you?" Tom shouted savagely. "Because she's your—"

"Tom!" I cried.

"Tom—oh, yes, now I remember." Obermuller got between us as he spoke. "Your friend up—in the country that you went to see and couldn't. Not a very good-looker, your friend, Nance. But—farming, I suppose, Mr.—Tom?—plays the deuce with one's looks. And another thing it does: it makes a man forget sometimes just how to behave in town. I'll be charmed, Mr. Tom, to oblige a friend of Miss Olden's; but I must insist that he does not talk like a—farmer."

He was quite close to Tom when he finished, and Tom was glaring up at him. And, Mag, I didn't know which one I was most afraid for. Don't you look at me that way, Mag Monahan, and don't you dare to guess anything!

"If you think," growled Tom, "that I'm going to let you get off with the girl, you're mighty—"

"Now, I've told you not to say that. The reason I'll do the thing she's going to ask of me—if it's what I think it is—is because this girl's a plucky little creature with a soul big enough to lift her out of the muck you probably helped her into. It's because she's got brains, talent, and a heart. It's because—well, it's because I feel like it, and she deserves a friend."

"You don't know what she is." It was a snarl from Tom. "You don't—"

"Oh, yes, I do; you cur! I know what she was, too. And I even know what she will be; but that doesn't concern you."

"The hell it don't!"

Obermuller turned his back on him. I was dumb and still. Tom Dorgan had struck me after all.

"What is it you want me to do, Nance?" Obermuller asked.

"Get him away on a steamer—quick," I murmured—I couldn't look him in the face—"without asking why, or what his name is."

He turned to Tom. "Well?"

"I won't go—not without her."

"Because you're so fond of her, eh? So fond, your first thought on quitting the—country was to come here to get her in trouble. If you've been traced—"

"Ah! You wouldn't like that, eh?" sneered Tom.

"Would you?"

"Well, I've had my share of it. And she ain't. Still—I . . . Just what would it be worth to you to have me out of the way?"

"Oh, Tom—Tom—" I cried.

But Obermuller got in front of me.

"It would be worth exactly one dollar and seventy-five cents. I think it will amount to about that for cab-hire. I guess the cars aren't any too safe for you, or it might be less. It may amount to something more before I get you shipped before the mast on the first foreign-bound boat. But what's more important," he added, bringing his fist down with a mighty thump on the table, "you have just ten seconds to make up your mind. At the end of that time I'll ring for the police."

* * * * * * * * * * *

I went down to the boat to see it sail, Mag, at seven this morning. No, not to say good-by to him. He didn't know I was there. It was to say good-by

to my old Tommy; the one I loved. Truly I did love him, Mag, though he never cared for me. No, he didn't. Men don't pull down the women they love; I know that now. If Tom Dorgan had ever cared for me he wouldn't have made a thief of me. If he'd cared, the last place on earth he'd have come to, when he knew the detectives would be on his track, would have been just the first place he made for. If he'd cared, he—

But it's done, Mag. It's all over. Cheap—that's what he is, this Tom Dorgan. Cheaply bad—a cheap bully, cheap-brained. Remember my wishing he'd have been a ventriloquist? Why, that man that tried to sell me to Obermuller hasn't sense enough to be a good scene-shifter. Oh—

The firm of Dorgan & Olden is dissolved, Mag. The retiring partner has gone into the theatrical business. As for Dorgan—the real one, poor fellow! jolly, handsome, big Tom Dorgan—he died. Yes, he died, Maggie, and was buried up there in the prison graveyard. A hard lot for a boy; but it's not the worst thing that can happen to him. He might become a man; such a man as that fellow that sailed away before the mast this morning.

X.

There I was seated in a box all alone—Miss Nancy Olden, by courtesy of the management, come to listen to the leading lady sing coon-songs, that I might add her to my collection of take-offs.

She's a fat leading lady, very fair and nearly fifty, I guess. But she's got a rollicking, husky voice in her fat throat that's sung the dollars down deep into her pockets. They say she's planted them deeper still—in the foundations of apartment houses—and that now she's the richest roly-poly on the Rialto.

Do you know, Maggie darlin', what I was saying to myself there in the box, while I watched the stage and waited for Obermuller? He said he'd drop in later, perhaps.

"Nance," I said, "I kind of fancy that apartment sort of idea myself. They tell you, Nancy, that when you've got the artistic temperament, that that's all you'll ever have. But there's a chance—one in a hundred—for a body to get that tempera-

ment mixed with a business instinct. It doesn't often happen. But when it does the result is—dollars. It may be, Nance—I shrewdly suspect it is a fact that you've got that marvelous mixture. Your early successes, Miss Olden, in another profession that I needn't name, would encourage the idea that you're not all heart and no head. I think, Nance, I shall have you mimic the artists during working hours and the business men when you're at play. I fancy apartment houses. They appeal to me. We'll call one 'The Nancy' and another 'Olden Hall' and another . . . "

"What'll I call the third apartment house, Mr. O ?" I asked aloud, as I heard the rings on the portière behind me click.

He didn't answer.

Without turning my head I repeated the question.

And yet—suddenly—before he could have answered, I knew something was wrong.

I turned. And in that moment a man took the seat beside me and another stood facing me, with his back against the portières.

"Miss Olden?" the man beside me asked.

"Yes."

"Nance Olden, the mimic, who entertains at private houses?"

I nodded.

"You—you were at Mrs. Paul Gates' just a week ago, and you gave your specialties there?"

"Yes—yes, what is it you want?"

He was a little man, but very muscular. I could note the play of his muscles even in the slight motion he made as he turned his body so as to get between me and the audience, while he leaned toward me, watching me intently with his small, quick, blue eyes.

"We don't want to make any scene here," he said very low. "We want to do it up as quietly as we can. There might be some mistake, you know, and then you'd be sorry. So should we. I hope you'll be reasonable and it'll be all the better for you because—"

"What are you talk—what—" I looked from him to the other fellow behind us.

He leaned a bit farther forward then, and pulling his coat partly open, he showed me a detective's badge. And the other man quickly did the same.

I sat back in my chair. The fat star on the stage, with her big mouth and big baby-face, was doing a

cake-walk up and down close to the footlights, yelling the chorus of her song.

I'll never mimic that song, Mag, although I can see her and hear it as plain as though I'd listened and watched her all my life. But there's no fun in it for me. I hate the very bars the orchestra plays before she begins to sing. I can't bear even to think of the words. The whole of it is full of horrible things—it smells of the jail—it looks like stripes—it . . .

"You're not going to faint?" asked the man, moving closer to me.

"Me? I never fainted in my life. . . Where is he now—Tom Dorgan?"

"Tom Dorgan!"

"Yes. I was sure I saw him sail, but, of course, I was mistaken. He has sent you after me, has he? I can hardly believe it of Tom—even—even yet."

"I don't know anything that connects you with Dorgan. If he was in with you on this, you'd better remember, before you say anything more, that it'll all be used against you."

The curtain had gone down and gone up again. I was watching the star. She has such a boyish

way of nodding her head, instead of bowing, after she waddles out to the center; and every time she wipes her lips with her lace handkerchief, as though she'd just taken one of the cocktails she makes in the play with all the skill of a bartender. I found myself doing the same thing—wiping my lips with that very same gesture, as though I had a fat, bare forearm like a rolling-pin—when all at once the thought came to me: "You needn't bother, Nancy. It's all up. You won't have any use for it all."

"Just what is the charge?" I asked, turning to the man beside me.

"Stealing a purse containing three hundred dollars from Mrs. Paul Gates' house on the night of April twenty-seventh."

"What!"

It was Obermuller. He had pushed the curtains aside; the crashing of the orchestra had prevented our hearing the clatter of the rings. He had pushed by the man standing there, had come in and—he had heard.

"Nance!" he cried. "I don't believe a word of it. He turned in his quick way to the men. "What are your orders?"

"To take her to her flat and search it."

Obermuller came over to me then, and took my hand for a minute.

"It's a pity they don't know about the Gray rose diamond," he whispered, helping me on with my jacket. "They'd see how silly this little three-hundred dollar business is. . . . Brace up, Nance Olden!"

Oh, Mag, Mag, to hear a man like that talk to you as though you were his kind, when you have the feel of the coarse prison stripes between your dry, shaking fingers, and the close prison smell is already poisoning your nostrils!

"I don't see—" my voice shook—"how you can believe—in me."

"Don't you?" he laughed. "That's easy. You've got brains, Nance, and the most imbecile thing you could do just now, when your foot is already on the ladder, would be just this—to get off in order to pick up a trinket out of the mud, when there's a fortune up at the top waiting for you. Clever people don't do asinine things. And other clever people know that they don't. You're clever, but so am I—in my weak, small way. Come along, little girl."

He pulled my hand in his arm and we walked out, followed by the two men.

Oh, no! It was all very quiet and looked just like a little theater party that had an early supper engagement. Obermuller nodded to the manager out in the deserted lobby, who stopped us and asked me what I thought of the star.

You'll think me mad, Mag. Those fellows with the badges were sure I was, but Obermuller's eyes only twinkled, and the manager's grin grew broad when, catching up the end of my skirt and cake-walking up and down, I sang under my breath that coon-song that was trailing over and over through my head.

"Bravo! bravo!" whispered the manager, hoarsely, clapping his hands softly.

I gave one of those quick, funny, boyish nods the star inside affects and wiped my lips with my handkerchief.

That brought down my house. Even the biggest fellow with the badge giggled recognizingly, and then put his hand quickly in front of his mouth and tried to look severe and official.

The color had come back to Obermuller's face; it was worth dancing for—that.

"Be patient, Mag; let me tell it my way."

There wasn't room in the coupé waiting out in front for more than two. So Obermuller couldn't come in it. But he put me in—Mag, dear, dear Mag—he put me in as if I was a lady—not like Gray; a real one. A thing like that counts when two detectives are watching. It counted afterward in the way they treated me.

The big man climbed up on the seat with the driver. The blue-eyed fellow got in and sat beside me, closing the door.

"I'll be out there almost as soon as you are," Obermuller said, standing a moment beside the lowered window.

"You good fellow!" I said, and then, trying to laugh: "I'll do as much for you some day."

He shook his fist laughingly at me, and I waved my hand as we drove off.

"You know, Miss, there may be some mistake about this," said the man next to me, "and—"

"Yes, there may be. In fact, there is."

"I'm sure I'll be very glad if it is a mistake. They do happen—though not often. You spoke of Dorgan—"

"Did I?"

"Yes, Tom Dorgan, who busted out of Sing Sing the other day."

"Surely you're mistaken," I said, smiling right into his blue eyes. "The Tom Dorgan I mentioned is a sleight-of-hand performer at the Vaudeville. Ever see him?"

"N—no."

"Clever fellow. You ought to. Perhaps you don't recognize him under that name. On the bills he's Professor Haughwout. Stage people have so many names, you know."

"Yes, so have—some other people."

I laughed, and he grinned back at me.

"Now that's mean of you," I said; "I never had but one. It was all I needed."

It flashed through me then what a thing like this might do to a name. You know, Mag, every bit of recognition an actress steals from the world is so much capital. It isn't like the old graft when you had to begin new every time you took up a piece of work. And your name—the name the world knows—and its knowing it makes it worth having like everything—that name is the sum of every scheme you've planned, of every time you've got away with the goods, of every laugh you've lifted, of

every bit of cleverness you've thought out and embodied, of everything that's in you, of everything you are.

But I didn't dare think long of this. I turned to him.

"Tell me about this charge," I said. "Where was the purse? Whose was it? And why haven't they missed it till after a week?"

"They missed it all right that night, but Mrs. Gates wanted it kept quiet till the servants had been shadowed and it was positively proved that they hadn't got away with it."

"And then she thought of me?"

"And then she thought of you."

"I wonder why?"

"Because you were the only person in that room except Mrs. Gates, the lady who lost the purse, Mrs. Ramsay, and—eh?"

"N—nothing. Mrs. Ramsay, you said?"

"Yes."

"Not Mrs. Edward Ramsay, of Philadelphia?"

"Oh, you know the name?"

"Oh, yes, I know it."

"It was printed, you know, in gold lettering on the inside flap and—"

"I don't know."

"Well, it was, and it contained three hundred dollars, Mrs. Ramsay says. She had slipped it under the fold of the spread at the top of the bed in the room where you took off your things in Mrs. Gates' presence, and put them on again when no one else was there."

"And you mean to tell me that this is all?" I raged at him; "that every bit of evidence you have to warrant your treating an innocent girl like—"

"You didn't behave like a very innocent girl, if you'll remember," he said dryly, "when I first came into the box. In fact, if that fellow hadn't just come in then I believe you'd 'a' confessed the whole job. . . . 'Tain't too late," he added.

I didn't answer. I put my head back against the cushions and closed my eyes. I could feel the scrutiny of his blue eyes on my naked face—your face is so unprotected with the eyes closed; like a fort whose battery is withdrawn. But I was tired—it tires you when you care. A year ago, Mag, this sort of thing—the risk, the nearness to danger, the chances one way or the other—would have intoxicated me. I used to feel as though I was dancing

on a volcano and daring it to explode. The more twistings and turnings there were to the labyrinth, the greater glory it was to get out. Maggie darlin', you have before you a mournful spectacle—the degeneration of Nancy Olden. It isn't that she's lost courage. It's only that she used to be able to think of only one thing, and now— What do you suppose it is, Mag? If you know, don't you dare to tell me.

When we got to the flat Obermuller was already there. At the door I pulled out my key and opened it with a flourish.

"Won't you come in, gentlemen, and spend the evening?" I asked.

They followed me in. First to the parlor. The two fellows threw off their coats and searched that through and through—not a drawer did they miss, not a bit of furniture did they fail to move. Obermuller and I sat there guying them as they pried about in their shirt-sleeves. That Trust business has taken the life out of him of late. All their tricks, all their squeezings, their cheatings, their bossing and bragging and bullying have got on to his nerves till he looks like a chained bear getting a drubbing. And he swears that they're in a con-

spiracy to freeze him and a few others like him out; he believes there's actually a paper in existence that would prove it. But this affair of the purse seemed to excite him till he behaved like a bad school-boy.

And I? Well, Nance Olden was never far behind at the Cruelty when there was anything going on. We trailed after them, and when they'd finished with the bedrooms—yours and mine—I asked the big fellow to come into the kitchen with Mr. O. and me, while the blue-eyed detective tackled the dining-room, and I'd get up a lunch for us all.

Mag, you should have seen Fred Obermuller with a big apron on him, dressing the salad while I was making sandwiches. The Cruelty taught me how to cook, even if it did teach me other things. You wouldn't have believed that the Trust had got him by the throat, and was choking the last breath out of him. You wouldn't have believed that our salaries hadn't been paid for three weeks, that our houses were dwindling every night, that—

I was thinking about it all there in the back of my head, trying to see a way out of it—you know if there is such an agreement as Obermuller swears there is, it's against the law—while we rattled on,

the two of us, like a couple of children on a picnic, when I heard a crash behind me.

The salad bowl had slipped from Obermuller's fingers. He stood with his back turned to me, his eyes fixed upon that searching detective.

But he wasn't searching any more, Mag. He was standing still as a pointer that's scented game. He had moved the lounge out from the wall, and there on the floor, spread open where it had fallen, lay a handsome elephant-skin purse, with gold corners. From where I stood, Mag, I could read the plain gold lettering on the dark leather. I didn't have to move. It was plain enough—quite plain.

MRS. EDWARD RAMSAY

Hush, hush, Mag; if you take on so, how can I tell you the rest?

Obermuller got in front of me as I started to walk into the dining-room. I don't know what his idea was. I don't suppose he does exactly—if it wasn't to spare me the sight of that damned thing.

Oh, how I hated it, that purse! I hated it as if it had been something alive that could be glad of what it had done. I wished it was alive that I could

tear and rend it and stamp on it and throw it in a fire, and drag it out again, with burned and bleeding nails, to tear it again and again. I wanted to fall on it and hide it; to push it far, far away out of sight; to stamp it down—down into the very bottom of the earth, where it could feel the hell it was making for me.

But I only stood there, stupidly looking at it, having pushed past Obermuller, as though I never wanted to see anything else.

And then I heard that blue-eyed fellow's words.

"Well," he said, pulling on his coat as though he'd done a good day's work, "I guess you'd just better come along with me."

XI.

"Don't you think you'd better get out of this?" I asked Obermuller, as he came into the station a few minutes after I got there.

"No."

"I do."

"Because?"

"Because it won't do you any good to have your name mixed up with a thing like this."

"But it might do you some good."

I didn't answer for a minute after that. I sat in my chair, my eyes bent on the floor. I counted the cracks between the chair and the floor of the office where the Chief was busy with another case. I counted them six times, back and forth, till my eyes were clear and my voice was steady.

"You're awfully good," I said, looking up at him as he stood by me. "You're the best fellow I ever knew. I didn't know men could be so good to women. . . But you'd better go—please. It'll be bad enough when the papers get hold of this,

without having them lump you in with a bad lot like me."

He put his hand on my shoulder and gave it a quick little shake.

"Don't say that about yourself. You're not a bad lot."

"But—you saw the purse."

"Yes, I saw it. But it hasn't proved anything to me but this: you're innocent, Nance, or you're crazy. If it's the first, I want to stand by you, little girl. If it's the second—good God! I've got to stand by you harder than ever."

Can you see me sitting there, Mag, in the bright, bare little room, with its electric lights, still in my white dress and big white hat, my pretty jacket fallen on the floor beside me? I could feel the sharp blue eyes of that detective Morris feeding on my miserable face. But I could feel, too, a warmth like wine poured into me from that big fellow's voice.

I put my hand up to him and he took it.

"If I'm innocent and can prove it, Fred Obermuller, I'll get even with you for—for this."

"Do you want to do something for me now?"

"Do I?"

"Well, if you want to help me, don't sit there looking like the criminal ghost of the girl I know."

The blood rushed to my face. Nance Olden, a sniveling coward! Me, showing the white feather —me, whimpering like a whipped puppy—me—Nance Olden!

"You know," I smiled up at him, "I never did enjoy getting caught."

"Hush! But that's better. . . . Tell me now—"

A buzzer sounded. The blue-eyed detective got up and came over to me.

"Chief's ready," he said. "This way."

They stopped Obermuller at the door. But he pushed past them.

"I want to say just a word to you, Chief," he said. "You remember me. I'm Obermuller, of the Vaudeville. If you'll send those fellows out and let me speak to you just a moment, I'll leave you alone with Miss Olden."

The Chief nodded to the blue-eyed detective, and he and the other fellow went out and shut the door behind them.

"I want simply to call your attention to the absurdity and unreasonableness of this thing," Ober-

muller said, leaning up against the Chief's desk, while he threw out his left hand with that big open gesture of his, "and to ask you to bear in mind, no matter what appearances may be, that Miss Olden is the most talented girl on the stage to-day; that in a very short time she will be at the top; that just now she is not suffering for lack of money; that she's not a high-roller, but a determined, hard-working little grind, and that if she did feel like taking a plunge, she knows that she could get all she wants from me even—"

"Even if you can't pay salaries when they're due, Obermuller." The Chief grinned under his white mustache.

"Even though the Trust is pushing me to the wall; going to such lengths that they're liable criminally as well as civilly, if I could only get my hands on proof of their rascality. It's true I can't pay salaries always when they're due, but I can still raise a few hundred to help a friend. And Miss Olden is a friend of mine. If you can prove that she took this money, you prove only that she's gone mad, but you don't—"

"All right, Obermuller. You're not the lawyer for the defense. That'll come later—if it does

come. I'll be glad to bear in mind all you've said, and much that you haven't."

"Thank you. Good night. . . . I'll wait for you, Nance, outside."

"I'm going to ask you a lot of questions, Miss Olden," the old Chief said, when we were alone. "Sit here, please. Morris tells me you've got more nerve than any woman that's ever come before me, so I needn't bother to reassure you. You don't look like a girl that's easily frightened. I have heard how you danced in the lobby of the Manhattan, how you guyed him at your flat, and were getting lunch and having a regular picnic of a time when—"

"When he found that purse."

"Exactly. Now, why did you do all that?"

"Why? Because I felt like it. I felt gay and excited and—"

"Not dreaming that that purse was sure to be found?"

"Not dreaming that there was such a purse in existence except from the detective's say-so, and never fancying for an instant that it would be found in my flat."

"Hm!" He looked at me from under his heavy,

wrinkled old lids. You don't get nice eyes from looking on the nasty things in this world, Mag.

"Why," I cried, "what kind of a girl could cut up like that when she was on the very edge of discovery?"

"A very smart girl—an actress; a good one; a clever thief who's used to bluffing. Of course," he added softly, "you won't misunderstand me. I'm simply suggesting the different kinds of girl that could have done what you did. But, if you don't mind, I'll do the questioning. Nance Olden," he turned suddenly on me, his manner changed and threatening, "what has become of that three hundred dollars?"

"Mr. Chief, you know just as much about that as I do."

I threw up my head and looked him full in the face. It was over now—all the shivering and trembling and fearing. Nance Olden's not a coward when she's fighting for her freedom; and fighting alone without any sympathizing friend to weaken her.

He returned the look with interest.

"I may know more," he said insinuatingly.

"Possibly." I shrugged my shoulders.

No, it wasn't put on. There never yet was a man who bullied me that didn't rouse the fighter in me. I swore to myself that this old thief-catcher shouldn't rattle me.

"Doesn't it occur to you that under the circumstances a full confession might be the very best thing for you? I shouldn't wonder if these people would be inclined to be lenient with you if you'd return the money. Doesn't it occur—"

"It might occur to me if I had anything to confess—about this purse."

"How long since you've seen Mrs. Edward Ramsay?" He rushed the question at me.

I jumped.

"How do you know I've ever seen her?"

"I do know you have."

"I don't believe you."

"Thank you; neither do I believe you, which is more to the point. Come, answer the question: how long is it since you have seen the lady?"

I looked at him. And then I looked at my glove, and slowly pulled the fingers inside out, and then—then I giggled. Suddenly it came to me—that silly, little insane dodge of mine in the Bishop's

carriage that day; the girl who had lost her name; and the use all that affair might be to me if ever—

"I'll tell you if you'll let me think a minute," I said sweetly. "It—it must be all of fifteen months."

"Ah! You see I did know that you've met the lady. If you're wise you'll draw deductions as to other things I know that you don't think I do. . . . And where did you see her?"

"In her own home."

"Called there," he sneered, "alone?"

"No," I said very gently. "I went there, to the best of my recollection, with the Bishop—yes, it was the Bishop, Bishop Van Wagenen."

"Indeed!"

I could see that he didn't believe a word I was saying, which made me happily eager to tell him more.

"Yes, we drove up to the Square one afternoon in the Bishop's carriage—the fat, plum-colored one, you know. We had tea there—at least, I did. I was to have spent the night, but—"

"That's enough of that."

I chuckled. Yes, Mag Monahan, I was enjoying myself. I was having a run for my money, even if it was the last run I was to have.

"So it's fifteen months since you've seen Mrs. Ramsay, eh?"

"Yes."

He turned on me with a roar.

"And yet it's only a week since you saw her at Mrs. Gates'."

"Oh, no."

"No? Take care!"

"That night at Mrs. Gates' it was dark, you know, in the front room. I didn't see Mrs. Ramsay that night. I didn't know she was there at all till—"

"Till?"

"Till later I was told."

"Who told you?"

"Her husband."

He threw down his pencil.

"Look here, this is no lark, young woman, and you needn't trouble yourself to weave any more fairy tales. Mr. Ramsay is in a—he's very ill. His own wife hasn't seen him since that night, so you see you're lying uselessly."

"Really!" So Edward didn't go back to Mrs. Gates' that night. Tut! tut! After his telephone message, too!

"Now, assuming your innocence of the theft, Miss Olden, what is your theory; how do you account for the presence of that purse in your flat?"

"Now, you've hit the part of it that really puzzles me. How do you account for it; what is your theory?"

He got to his feet, pushing his chair back sharply.

"My theory, if you want to know it, is that you stole the purse; that your friend Obermuller believes you did; that you got away with the three hundred, or hid it away, and—"

"And what a stupid thief I must be, then, to leave the empty purse under my lounge!"

"How do you know it was empty?" he demanded sharply.

"You said so. . . Well, you gave me to understand that it was, then. What difference does it make? It would be a still stupider thief who'd leave a full purse instead of an empty one under his own lounge."

"Yes; and you're not stupid, Miss Olden."

"Thank you. I'm sorry I can't say as much for you."

I couldn't help it. He was such a stupid. The

idea of telling me that Fred Obermuller believed me guilty! The idea of thinking me such a fool as to believe that! Such men as that make criminals. They're so fat-witted you positively ache—they so tempt you to pull the wool over their eyes. O Mag, if the Lord had only made men cleverer, there'd be fewer Nancy Oldens.

The Chief blew a blast at his speaking-tube that made his purple cheeks seem about to burst. My shoulders shook as I watched him, he was so wrathy.

And I was still laughing when I followed the detective out into the waiting-room, where Obermuller was pacing the floor. At the sight of my smiling face he came rushing to me.

"Nance!" he cried.

"Orders are, Morris," came in a bellow from the Chief at his door, "that no further communication be allowed between the prisoner and—"

Phew! All the pertness leaked out of me. Oh, Mag, I don't like that word. It stings—it binds—it cuts.

I don't know what I looked like then; I wasn't thinking of me. I was watching Obermuller's face.

It seemed to grow old and thin and haggard before my eyes, as the blood drained out of it. He turned with an exclamation to the Chief and—

And just then there came a long ring at the telephone.

Why did I stand there? O Mag, when you're on your way to the place I was bound for, when you know that before you'll set foot in this same bright little room again, the hounds in half a dozen cities will have scratched clean every hiding-place you've had, when your every act will be known and—and —oh, then, you wait, Mag, you wait for anything —anything in the world; even a telephone call that may only be bringing in another wretch like yourself; bound, like yourself, for the Tombs.

The Chief himself went to answer it.

"Yes—what?" he growled. "Well, tell Long Distance to get busy. What's that? St. Francis—that's the jag ward, isn't it? Who is it? Who? Ramsay!"

I caught Obermuller's hand.

"I don't hear you," the Chief roared. "Oh—yes? Yes, we've got the thief, but the money—no, we haven't got the money. The deuce you say!

Took it yourself? Out of your wife's purse—yes. . . . Yes. But we've got the— What? Don't remember where you—"

"Steady, Nance," whispered Obermuller, grabbing my other hand.

I tried to stand steady, but everything swayed and I couldn't hear the rest of what the Chief was saying, though all my life seemed condensed into a listening. But I did hear when he jammed the receiver on the hook and faced us.

"Well, they've got the money. Ramsay took the purse himself, thinking it wasn't safe there under the spread where any servant might be tempted who chanced to uncover it. You'll admit the thing looked shady. The reason Mrs. Ramsay didn't know of it is because the old man's just come to his senses in a hospital and been notified that the purse was missing."

"I want to apologize to you, Chief," I mumbled.

"For thinking me stupid? Oh, we were both—"

"No, for thinking me not stupid. I am stupid—stupid—stupid. The old fellow I told you about, Mr. O., and the way I telephoned him out of the flat that night—it was—"

"Ramsay!"

I nodded, and then crumbled to the floor.

It was then that they sent for you, Mag.

Why didn't I tell it straight at the first, you dear old Mag? Because I didn't know the straight of it, then, myself. I was so heavy-witted I never once thought of Edward. He must have taken the bills out of the purse and then crammed them in his pocket while he was waiting there on the lounge and I was pretending to telephone and—

But it's best as it is—oh, so best! Think, Mag. Two people who knew her—who knew her, mind—believed in Nancy Olden, in spite of appearances: Obermuller, while we were in the thick of it, and you, you dear girl, while I was telling you of it.

XII.

When Obermuller sent for me I thought he wanted to see me about that play he's writing in which I'm to star—when the pigs begin to fly.

Funniest thing in the world about that man, Mag. He knows he can't get bookings for any play on earth; that if he did they'd be canceled and any old excuse thrown at him, as soon as Tausig heard of it and could put on the screws. He knows that there isn't an unwatched hole in theatrical America through which he can crawl and pull me and the play in after him. And yet he just can't let go working on it. He loves it, Mag; he loves it as Molly loved that child of hers that kept her nursing it all the years of its life, and left her feeling that the world had been robbed of everything there was for a woman to do when it died.

Obermuller has told me all the plot. In fact, he's worked it out on me. I know it as it is, as he wanted it to be, and as it's going to be. He tells me he's built it up about me; that it will fit me as never

a comedy fitted a player yet, and that we'll make such a hit—the play and I together—that . . .

And then he remembers that there's no chance; not the ghost of one; and he falls to swearing at the Trust.

"Don't you think, Mr. O.," I said, as he began again when I came into his office, "that it might be as well to quit cursing the Syndicate till you've got something new to say or something different to rail about? It seems to me a man's likely to get daffy if he keeps harping on—"

"Oh, I've got it all right, Nance, be sure of that! I've got something different to say of them and something new to swear about. They've done me up; that's all. Just as they've fixed Iringer and Gaffney and Howison."

"Tell me."

He threw out his arms and then let them fall to his side.

"Oh, it's easy," he cried, "so easy that I never thought of it. They've just bought the Vaudeville out of hand and served notice on me that when my lease expires next month they'll not be able to renew it, 'unfortunately'! That's all. No; not quite. In order to kill all hope of a new plan in

me they've just let it get to be understood that any man or woman that works for Obermuller needn't come round to them at any future time."

"Phew! A blacklist."

"Not anything so tangible. It's just a hint, you know, but it works all right. It works like—"

"What are you going to do; what can you do?"

"Shoot Tausig or myself, or both of us."

"Nonsense!"

"Yes, of course, it's nonsense, or rather it's only what I'd like to do. . . . But that's not the question. Never mind about me. It's what are you going to do?"

He looked straight at me, waiting. But I didn't answer. I was thinking.

"You don't realize, Nance, what those fellows are capable of. When Gaffney told me, before he gave up and went West, that there was a genuine signed conspiracy among them to crush out us independents, I laughed at him. 'It's a dream, Gaffney,' I said. 'Forget it.' 'It's no dream, as you'll find out when your turn comes in time,' he shouted. 'It's a fact, and what's more, Iringer once taxed Tausig to his face with it; told him he knew there was such a document in existence, signed by the

great Tausig himself, by Heffelfinger of the Pacific circuit; by Dixon of Chicago, and Weinstock of New Orleans, binding themselves to force us fellows to the wall, and specifying the per cent. of profit each one of 'em should get on any increase of business; to blacklist every man and woman that worked for us; to buy up our debts and even bring false attachments, when—'"

"Now, weren't there enough real debts to satisfy 'em? They're hard to please, if you haven't creditors enough to suit 'em!"

He looked grim, but he didn't speak.

"I don't believe it, anyway, Mr. O ; and 'tisn't good for you to keep thinking about just one thing. You'll land where Iringer did, if you don't look out. How did he know about it, anyway?"

"There was a leak in Tausig's office. Iringer used to be in with them, and he had it from a clerk who—but never mind that. It's the blacklisting I'm talking about now. Gray's just been in to see me, to let me know that she quits at the end of the season. And his Lordship, too, of course. You're not burdened with a contract, Nance. Perhaps you'd better think it over seriously for a day or two and decide if it wouldn't be best—"

"I don't have to," I interrupted then.

"Nance!" he cried, jumping up, as though he'd been relieved of half his troubles.

"I don't have to think it over," I went on slowly, not looking at the hand he held out to me. "It doesn't take long to know that when you're between the devil and the deep sea, you'd better try the devil rather than be forced out into the wet."

"What?—you don't mean—"

I knew he was looking at me incredulously, but I just wouldn't meet his eye.

"My staying with you will do you no good—" I was hurrying now to get it over with—"and it would do me a lot of harm. I think you're right, Mr. Obermuller; I'd better just go over to where it's warm. They'll be glad to get me and—and, to tell the truth, I'll be glad to get in with the Syndicate, even if I can't make as good terms as I might have by selling that contract, which—like the famous conspiracy you're half mad about—never existed."

He sat down on the edge of the desk. I caught one glimpse of his face. It was black; that was enough for me. I turned to go.

"Ah, but it did, Miss Olden, it did!" he sneered.

"I won't believe it on the word of a man that's been in the lunatic asylum ever since he lost his theater."

"Perhaps you'll believe it on mine."

I jumped. "On yours!"

"Didn't that little bully, when he lost his temper that day at the Van Twiller, when we had our last fight—didn't he pull a paper out of his box and shake it in my face, and—"

"But—you could have them arrested for conspiracy and—"

"And the proof of it could be destroyed and then—but I can't see how this interests you."

"No—no," I said thoughtfully. "I only happened to lump it in with the contract we haven't—you and I. And as there's no contract, why there's no need of my waiting till the end of the season."

"Do you mean to say you'd—you'd—"

"If 'twere done, 'twere better it'd be done quickly," I said Macbethically.

He looked at me. Sitting there on his desk, his clenched fist on his knee, he looked for a moment as though he was about to fly at me. Then all of a sudden he slipped into his chair, leaned back and laughed.

It wasn't a pleasant laugh, Mag. No—wait. Let me tell you the rest.

"You are so shrewd, Olden, so awfully shrewd! Your eye is so everlastingly out for the main chance, and you're still so young that I predict a—a great future for you. I might even suggest that by cultivating Tausig personally—"

"You needn't."

"No, you're right; I needn't. You can discount any suggestion I might make. You just want to be the first to go over, eh? To get there before Gray does—to get all there is in it for the first rebel that lays down his arms; not to come in late when submission is stale—and cheap. Don't worry about terms, you poor little babe in the woods. Don't—" His own words seemed to choke him.

"Don't you think—" I began a bit unsteadily.

"I think—oh, what a fool I've been!"

That stiffened me.

"Of course, you have," I said cordially. "It's silly to fight the push, isn't it? It's only the cranks that get cocky and think they can upset the fellows on top. The thing to do is to find out which is the stronger—if you're a better man than the other fellow, down him. If he's the

champion, enlist under him. But be in it. What's the use of being a kicker all your life? You only let some one else come in for the soft things, while you stay outside and gnaw your finger-nails and plot and plan and starve. You spend your life hoping to live to-morrow, while the Tausigs are living high to-day. The thing to do is to be humble if you can't be arrogant. If they've got you in the door, don't curse, but placate them. Think of Gaffney herding sheep out in Nevada; of Iringer in the asylum; of Howison—"

"Admirable! admirable!" he interrupted sarcastically. "The only fault I have to find with your harangue is that you've misconceived my meaning entirely. But I needn't enlighten you. Good morning, Miss Olden—good-by."

He turned to his desk and pulled out some papers. I knew he wasn't so desperately absorbed in them as he pretended to be.

"Won't you shake hands," I asked, "and wish me luck?"

He put down his pen. His face was white and hard, but as he looked at me it gradually softened.

"I suppose—I suppose, I am a bit unreasonable just this minute," he said slowly. "I'm hard hit

and—and I don't just know the way out. Still, I haven't any right to—to expect more of you than there is in you, you poor little thing! It's not your fault, but mine, that I've expected—Oh, for God's sake—Nance—go, and leave me alone!"

I had to take that with me to the Van Twiller, and it wasn't pleasant. But Tausig received me with open arms.

"Got tired of staying out in the cold—eh?" he grinned.

"I'm tired of vaudeville," I answered. "Can't you give me a chance in a comedy?"

"Hm! Ambitious, ain't you?"

"Obermuller has a play all ready for me—written for me. He'd star me fast enough if he had the chance."

"But he'll never get the chance."

"Oh, I don't know."

"But I do. He's on the toboggan; that's where they all get, my dear, when they get big-headed enough to fight us."

"But Obermuller's not like the others. He's not so easy. And he is so clever; why, the plot of that comedy is the bulliest thing—"

"You've read it—you remember it?"

"Oh, I know it by heart—my part of it. You see, he wouldn't keep away from me while he was thinking of it. He kept consulting me about everything in it. In a way, we worked over it together."

The little man looked at me, slowly closing one eye. It is a habit of his when he's going to do something particularly nasty.

"Then, in a way, as you say, it is part yours."

"Hardly! Imagine Nance Olden writing a line of a play!"

"Still you—collaborated; that's the word. . . I say, my dear, if I could read that comedy, and it was—half what you say it is, I might—I don't promise, mind—but I might let you have the part that was written for you and put the thing on. Has he drilled you any, eh? He was the best stage-manager we ever had before he got the notion of managing for himself—and ruining himself."

"Well, he's all that yet. Of course, he has told me, and we agreed how the thing should be done. As he'd write, you know, he'd read the thing over to me, and I—"

"Fine—fine! A reading from that fool Obermuller would be enough to open the eyes of a clever woman. I'd like to read that comedy—yes?"

"But Obermuller would never—"

"But Olden might—"

"What?"

"Dictate the plot to my secretary, Mason, in there," he nodded his head back toward the inner room. "She could give him the plot and as much of her own part in full as she could remember. You know Mason. Used to be a newspaper man. Smart fellow, that, when he's sober. He could piece out the holes—yes?"

I looked at him. The little beast sat there, slowly closing one eye and opening it again. He looked like an unhealthy little frog, with his bald head, his thin-lipped mouth that laughed, while the wrinkles rayed away from his cold, sneering eyes that had no smile in them.

"I—I wouldn't like to make an enemy of a man like Obermuller, Mr. Tausig."

"Bah! Ain't I told you he's on the toboggan?"

"But you never can tell with a man like that. Suppose he got into that combine with Heffelfinger and Dixon and Weinstock?"

"What're you talking about?"

"Well, it's what I've heard."

"But Heffelfinger and Dixon and Weinstock are all in with us; who told you that fairy story?"

"Obermuller himself."

The little fellow laughed. His is a creaky, almost silent little laugh; if a spider could laugh he'd laugh that way.

"They're fooling him a bunch or two. Never you mind Obermuller. He's a dead one."

"Oh, he said that you thought they were in with you, but that nothing but a written agreement would hold men like that. And that you hadn't got."

"Smart fellow, that Obermuller. He'd have been a good man to have in the business if it hadn't been for those independent ideas he's got. He's right; it takes—"

"So there is an agreement!" I shouted, in spite of myself, as I leaned forward.

He sat back in his chair, or, rather, he let it swallow him again.

"What business is that of yours? Stick to the business on hand. Get to work on that play with Mason inside. If it's good, and we decide to put it on, we'll pay you five hundred dollars down in ad-

dition to your salary. If it's rot, you'll have your salary weekly all the time you're at it, just the same as if you were working, till I can place you. In the meantime, keep your ears and eyes open and watch things, and your mouth shut. I'll speak to Mason and he'll be ready for you to-morrow morning. Come round in the morning; there's nobody about then, and we want to keep this thing dark till it's done. Obermuller mustn't get any idea what we're up to. . . . He don't love you—no—for shaking him?"

"He's furious; wouldn't even say good-by. I'm done for with him, anyway, I guess. But what could I do?"

"Nothing, my dear; nothing. You're a smart little girl," he chuckled. "Ta-ta!"

XIII.

Just what I'd been hoping for I don't know, but I knew that my chance had come that morning.

For a week I had been talking Obermuller's comedy to Mason, the secretary. In the evenings I stood about in the wings and watched the Van Twiller company in *Brambles*. There was one fat rôle in it that I just ached for, but I lost all that ache and found another, when I overheard two of the women talking about Obermuller and me one night.

"He found her and made her," one of 'em said; "just dug her out of the ground. See what he's done for her; taught her every blessed thing she knows; wrote her mimicking monologues for her; gave her her chance, and—and now— Well, Tausig don't pay salaries for nothing, and she gets hers as regularly as I draw mine. What more I don't know. But she hasn't set foot on the stage yet under Tausig, and they say Obermuller—"

I didn't get the rest of it, so I don't know what

they say about Obermuller. I only know what they've said to him about me. 'Tisn't hard to make men believe those things. But I had to stand it. What could I do? I couldn't tell Fred Obermuller that I was making over his play, soul and as much body as I could remember, to Tausig's secretary. He'd have found that harder to believe than the other thing.

It hasn't been a very happy week for me, I can tell you, Maggie. But I forgot it all, every shiver and ache of it, when I came into the office that morning, as usual, and found Mason alone.

Not altogether alone—he had his bottle. And he had had it and others of the same family all the night before. The poor drunken wretch hadn't been home at all. He was worse than he'd been that morning three days before, when I had stood facing him and talking to him, while with my hands behind my back I was taking a wax impression of the lock of the desk; and he as unconscious of it all as Tausig himself.

The last page I had dictated the day before, which he'd been transcribing from his notes, lay in front of him; the gas was still burning directly above him, and a shade he wore over his weak eyes

had been knocked awry as his poor old bald head went bumping down on the type-writer before him.

The thing that favored me was Tausig's distrust of everybody connected with him. He hates his partners only a bit less than he hates the men outside the Trust. The bigger and richer the Syndicate grows, the more power and prosperity it has, the more he begrudges them their share of it; the more he wants it all for himself. He is madly suspicious of his clerks, and hires others to watch them, to spy upon them. He is continually moving his valuables from place to place, partly because he trusts no man; partly because he's so deathly afraid his right hand will find out what his left is doing. He is a full partner of Braun and Lowenthal—with mental reservations. He has no confidence in either of them. Half his schemes he keeps from them; the other half he tells them—part of. He's for ever afraid that the Syndicate of which he's the head will fall to pieces and become another Syndicate of which he won't be head.

It all makes him an unhappy, restless little beast; but it helped me to-day. If it'd been any question of safe combinations and tangled things like that, the game would have been all up for Nancy O. But

in his official safe Tausig keeps only such papers as he wants Braun and Lowenthal to see. And in his private desk in his private office he keeps—

I stole past Mason, sleeping with his forehead on the type-writer keys—he'll be lettered like the obelisk when he wakes up—and crept into the next room to see just what Tausig keeps in that private desk of his.

Oh, yes, it was locked. But hadn't I been carrying the key to it every minute for the last forty-eight hours? There must be a mine of stuff in that desk of Tausig's, Mag. The touch of every paper in it is slimy with some dirty trick, some bad secret, some mean action. It's a pity that I hadn't time to go through 'em all; it would have been interesting; but under a bundle of women's letters, which that old fox keeps for no good reason, I'll bet, I lit on a paper that made my heart go bumping like a cart over cobbles.

Yes, there it was, just as Obermuller had vowed it was, with Tausig's cramped little signature followed by Heffelfinger's, Dixon's and Weinstock's; a scheme to crush the business life out of men by the cleverest, up-to-date Trust deviltry; a thing that our Uncle Sammy just won't stand for.

And neither will Nancy Olden, Miss Monahan.

She grabbed that precious paper with a gasp of delight and closed the desk.

But she bungled a bit there, for Mason lifted his head and blinked dazedly at her for a moment, recognized her and shook his head.

"No—work to-day," he said.

"No—I know. I'll just look over what we've done, Mr. Mason," she answered cheerfully.

His poor head went down again with a bob, and she caught up the type-written sheets of Obermuller's play. She waited a minute longer; half because she wanted to make sure Mason was asleep again before she tore the sheets across and crammed them down into the waste-basket; half because she pitied the old fellow and was sorry to take advantage of his condition. But she knew a cure for this last sorry—a way she'd help him later; and when she danced out into the hall she was the very happiest burglar in a world chock full of opportunities.

Oh, she was in such a twitter as she did it! All that old delight in doing somebody else up, a vague somebody whose meannesses she didn't know, was as nothing to the joy of doing Tausig up. She

was dancing on a volcano again, that incorrigible Nance! Oh, but such a volcano, Maggie! It atoned for a year of days when there was nothing doing; no excitement, no risk, nothing to keep a girl interested and alive.

And, Maggie darlin', it was a wonderful volcano, that one, that last one, for it worked both ways. It paid up for what I haven't done this past year and what I'll never do again in the years to come. It made up to me for all I've missed and all I'm going to miss. It was a reward of demerit for not being respectable, and a preventive of further sins. Oh, it was such a volcano as never was. It was a drink and a blue ribbon in one. It was a bang-up end and a bully beginning. It was—

It was Tausig coming in as I was going out. Suddenly I realized that, but I was in such a mad whirl of excitement that I almost ran over the little fellow before I could stop myself.

"Phew! What a whirlwind you are!" he cried. "Where are you going?"

"Oh, good morning, Mr. Tausig," I said sweetly. "I never dreamed you'd be down so early in the morning."

"What're you doing with the paper?" he demanded suspiciously.

My eye followed his. I could have beaten Nancy Olden in that minute for not having sense enough to hide that precious agreement, instead of carrying it rolled up in her hand.

"Just taking it home to go over it," I said carelessly, trying to pass him.

But he barred my way.

"Where's Mason?" he asked.

"Poor Mason!" I said. "He's—he's asleep."

"Drunk again?"

I nodded. How to get away!

"That settles his hash. Out he goes to-day. . . . It seems to me you're in a deuce of a hurry," he added, as I tried to get out again. "Come in; I want to talk something over with you."

"Not this morning," I said saucily. I wanted to cry. "I've got an engagement to lunch, and I want to go over this stuff for Mason before one."

"Hm! An engagement. Who with, now?"

My chin shot up in the air. He laughed, that cold, noiseless little laugh of his.

"But suppose I want you to come to lunch with me?"

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Tausig. But how could I break my engagement with—"

"With Braun?"

"How did you guess it?" I laughed. "There's no keeping anything from you."

He was immensely satisfied with his little self. "I know him—that old rascal," he said slowly. "I say, Olden, just do break that engagement with Braun."

"I oughtn't—really."

"But do—eh? Finish your work here and we'll go off together, us two, at twelve-thirty, and leave him cooling his heels here when he comes." He rubbed his hands gleefully.

"But I'm not dressed."

"You'll do for me."

"But not for me. Listen: let me hurry home now and I'll throw Braun over and be back here to meet you at twelve-thirty."

He pursed up his thin little lips and shook his head. But I slipped past him in that minute and got out into the street.

"At twelve-thirty," I called back as I hurried off.

I got around the corner in a jiffy. Oh, I could hardly walk, Mag! I wanted to fly and dance and skip. I wanted to kick up my heels as the children were doing in the Square, while the organ ground out, *Ain't It a Shame?* I actually did a step or two with them, to their delight, and the first thing I knew I felt a bit of a hand in mine like a cool pink snowflake and—

Oh, a baby, Mag! A girl-baby more than a year old and less than two years young; too little to talk; too big not to walk; facing the world with a winning smile and jabbering things in her soft little lingo, knowing that every woman she meets will understand.

I did, all right. She was saying to me as she kicked out her soft, heelless little boot:

"Nancy Olden, I choose you. Nancy Olden, I love you. Nancy Olden, I dare you not to love me. Nancy Olden, I defy you not to laugh back at me!"

Where in the world she dropped from, heaven knows. The organ-grinder picked up the shafts of his wagon and trundled it away. The piccaninnies melted like magic. But that gay little flirt, about a year and a half old, just held on to my finger and gabbled—poetry.

I didn't realize just then that she was a lost, strayed or stolen. I expected every moment some nurse or conceited mamma to appear and drag her away from me. And I looked down at her—oh, she was just a little bunch of soft stuff; her face was a giggling dimple, framed in a big round hat-halo, that had fallen from her chicken-blond head; and her white dress, with the blue ribbons at the shoulders, was just a little bit dirty. I like 'em a little bit dirty. Why? Perhaps because I can imagine having a little coquette of my own a bit dirty like that, and can't just see Nance Olden with a spick-and-span clean baby, all feathers and lace, like a bored little grown-up.

"You're a mouse," I gurgled down at her. "You're a sweetheart. You're a—"

And suddenly I heard a cry and rush behind me.

It was a false alarm; just a long-legged girl of twelve rushing round the corner, followed by a lot of others. It hadn't been meant for me, of course, but in the second when I had remembered that precious paper and Tausig's rage when he should miss it, I had pulled my hand away from that bit baby's and started to run.

The poor little tot! There isn't any reason in

the world for the fancies they take any more than for our own; eh, Mag? Why should she have been attracted to me just because I was so undignified as to dance with the piccaninnies?

But do you know what that little thing did? She thought I was playing with her. She gave a crow of delight and came bowling after me.

That finished me. I stooped and picked her up in my arms, throwing her up in the air to hear her crow and feel her come down again.

"Mouse," I said, "we'll just have a little trip together. The nurse that'd lose you deserves to worry till you're found. The mother that's lucky enough to own you will be benefited hereafter by a sharp scare on your account just now. Come on, sweetheart!"

Oh, the feel of a baby in your arms, Mag! It makes the Cruelty seem a perfectly unreal thing, a thing one should be unutterably ashamed of imagining, of accusing human nature of; a thing only an irredeemably vile thing could imagine. Just the weight of that little body riding like a bonny boat at anchor on your arm, just the cocky little way it sits up, chirping and confident; just the light touch of a bit of a hand on your collar; just that is

enough to push down brick walls; to destroy pictures of bruised and maimed children that endure after the injuries are healed; to scatter records that even I—I, Nancy Olden—can't believe and believe, too, that other women have carried their babies, as I did some other woman's baby, across the Square.

On the other side I set her down. I didn't want to. I was greedy of every moment that I had her. But I wanted to get some change ready before climbing up the steps to the L-station.

She clutched my dress as we stood there a minute in a perfectly irresistible way. I know now why men marry baby-women: it's to feel that delicious, helpless clutch of weak fingers; the clutch of dependence, of trust, of appeal.

I looked down at her with that same silly adoration I've seen on Molly's face for her poor, lacking, twisted boy. At least, I did in the beginning. But gradually the expression of my face must have changed; for all at once I discovered what had been done to me.

My purse was gone.

Yes, Maggie Monahan, clean gone! My pocket had been as neatly picked as I myself—well, never

mind, as what. I threw back my head and laughed aloud. Nance Olden, the great doer-up, had been done up so cleverly, so surely, so prettily, that she hadn't had an inkling of it.

I wished I could get a glimpse of the clever girl that did it. A girl—of course, it was! Do you think any boy's fingers could do a job like that and me not even know?

But I didn't stop to wish very long. Here was I with the thing I valued most in the world still clutched in my hand, and not a nickel to my name to get me, the paper, and the baby on our way.

It was the baby, of course, that decided me. You can't be very enterprising when you're carrying a pink lump of sweetness that's all a-smile at the moment, but may get all a-tear the next.

"It's you for the nearest police station, you young tough!" I said, squeezing her. "I can't take you home now and show you to Mag."

But she giggled and gurgled back at me, the abandoned thing, as though the police station was just the properest place for a young lady of her years.

It was not so very near, either, that station. My arm ached when I got there from carrying her, but

my heart ached, too, to leave her. I told the matron how and where the little thing had picked me up. At first she wouldn't leave me, but—the fickle little thing—a glass of milk transferred all her smiles and wiles to the matron. Then we both went over her clothes to find a name or an initial or a laundry mark. But we found nothing. The matron offered me a glass of milk, too, but I was in a hurry to be gone. She was a nice matron; so nice that I was just about to ask her for the loan of car-fare when—

When I heard a voice, Maggie, in the office adjoining. I knew that voice all right, and I knew that I had to make a decision quick.

I did. I threw the whole thing into the lap of Fate. And when I opened the door and faced him I was smiling.

Oh, yes, it was Tausig.

XIV.

He started as though he couldn't believe his eyes when he saw me. "The Lord hath delivered mine enemy into my hand," shone in his evil little face.

"Why, Mr. Tausig," I cried, before he could get his breath. "How odd to meet you here! Did you find a baby, too?"

"Did I find—" He glared at me. "I find you; that's enough. Now—"

"But the luncheon was to be at twelve-thirty," I laughed. "And I haven't changed my dress yet."

"You'll change it all right for something not so becoming if you don't shell out that paper."

"Paper?"

"Yes, paper. Look here, if you give it back to me this minute—now—I'll not prosecute you for—for—"

"For the sake of my reputation?" I suggested softly.

"Yes." He looked doubtfully at me, mistrusting the amiable deference of my manner.

"That would be awfully good of you," I murmured.

He did not answer, but watched me as though he wasn't sure which way I'd jump the next moment.

"I wonder what could induce you to be so forgiving," I went on musingly. "What sort of paper is this you miss? It must be valuable—"

"Yes, it's valuable all right. Come on, now! Quit your fooling and get down to business. I'm going to have that paper."

"Do you know, Mr. Tausig," I said impulsively, "if I were you, and anybody had stolen a valuable paper from me, I'd have him arrested. I would. I should not care a rap what the public exposure did to his reputation, so long—so long," I grinned right up at him, "so long as it didn't hurt me, myself, in the eyes of the law."

Mad? Oh, he was hopping! A German swear-word burst from him. I don't know what it meant, but I can imagine.

"Look here, I give you one more chance," he squeaked; "if you don't—"

"What'll you do?"

I was sure I had him. I was sure, from the very whisper in which he had spoken, that the last thing

in the world he wanted was to have that agreement made public by my arrest. But I tripped up on one thing. I didn't know there was a middle way for a man with money.

His manner changed.

"Nance Olden," he said aloud now, "I charge you with stealing a valuable private paper of mine from my desk. Here, Sergeant!"

I hadn't particularly noticed the Sergeant standing at the other door with his back to us. But from the way he came at Tausig's call I knew he'd had a private talk with him, and I knew he'd found the middle way.

"This girl's taken a paper of mine. I want her searched," Tausig cried.

"Do you mean," I said, "that you'll sign your name to such a charge against me?"

He didn't answer. He had pulled the Sergeant down and was whispering in his ear. I knew what that meant. It meant a special pull and a special way of doing things and—

"You'll do well, my girl, to give up Mr. Tausig's property to him," the Sergeant said stiffly.

"But what have I got that belongs to him?" I demanded.

He grinned and shrugged his big shoulders.

"We've a way of finding out, you know, here. Give it up or—"

"But what does he say I've taken? What charge is there against me? Have you the right to search any woman who walks in here? And what in the world would I want a paper of Tausig's for?"

"You won't give it up then?" He tapped a bell.

A woman came in. I had a bad minute there, but it didn't last; it wasn't the matron I'd brought the baby to.

"You'll take this girl into the other room and search her thoroughly. The thing we're looking for—" The Sergeant turned to Tausig.

"A small paper," he said eagerly. "A—a contract—just a single sheet of legal cap paper it was, type-written and signed by myself and some other gentlemen, and folded twice."

The woman looked at me. She was a bit hard-mouthed, with iron-gray hair, but her eyes looked as though they'd seen a lot and learned not to flinch, though they still felt like it. I knew that kind of look—I'd seen it at the Cruelty.

"What an unpleasant job this of yours is," I said to her, smiling up at her for all the world as that

like of a baby had smiled at me, and watching her melt just as I had. "I'll not make it a bit harder. This thing's all a mistake. Which way? . . . I'll come back, Mr. Tausig, to receive your apology, but you can hardly expect me to go to lunch after this."

He growled a wrathful, resenting mouthful. But he looked a bit puzzled just the same.

He looked more puzzled yet, even bewildered, when we came back into the main office a quarter of an hour later, the woman and I, and she reported that no paper of any kind had she found.

Me? Oh, I was sweet amiability personified with the woman and with the Sergeant, who began to back-water furiously. But with Tausig—

What? You don't mean to say you're not on, Mag? Oh, dear, dear, it's well you had that beautiful wig of red hair that puts even Carter's in the shade; for you'd never have been a success in—in other businesses I might name.

Bamboozled the woman? Not a bit of it; you can't deceive women with mouths and eyes like that. It was just that I'd had a flash of genius in the minute I heard Tausig's voice, and in spite of my being so sure he wouldn't have me arrested I'd—

Guess, Mag, guess! There was only one way.

The baby, of course! In the moment I had—it wasn't long—I'd stooped down, pretending to kiss that cherub good-by, and in a jiffy I'd pinned that precious paper with a safety-pin to the baby's under-petticoat, preferring that risk to—

Risk! I should say it was. And now it was up to Nance to make good.

While Tausig insisted and explained and expostulated and at last walked out with the Sergeant —giving me a queer last look that was half-cursing, half-placating—I stood chatting sweetly with the woman who had searched me.

I didn't know just how far I might go with her. She knew the paper wasn't on me, and I could see she was disposed to believe I was as nice as she'd have liked me to be. But she'd had a lot of experience and she knew, as most women do even without experience, that if there's not always fire where there is smoke, it's because somebody's been clever enough and quick enough to cover the blaze.

"Well, good-by," I said, putting out my hand. "It's been disagreeable but I'm obliged to you for—why, where's my purse! We must have left it—"

And I turned to go back into the room where I'd undressed.

"You didn't have any."

The words came clear and cold and positive. Her tone was like an icicle down my back.

"I didn't have any!" I exclaimed. "Why, I certainly—"

"You certainly had no purse, for I should have seen it and searched it if you had."

Now, what do you think of a woman like that?

"Nancy Olden," I said to myself, more in sorrow than in anger, "you've met your match right here. When a woman knows a fact and states it with such quiet conviction, without the least unnecessary emphasis and not a superfluous word, 'ware that woman. There's only one game to play to let you hang round here a bit longer and find out what's become of the baby. Play it!"

I looked at her with respect; it was both real and feigned.

"Of course, you must be right," I said humbly. "I know you wouldn't be likely to make a mistake, but, just to convince me, do you mind letting me go back to look?"

"Not at all," she said placidly. "If I go with you there's no reason why you should not look."

Oh, Mag, it was hard lines looking. Why?—Why, because the place was so bare and so small. There were so few things to move and it took such a short time, in spite of all I could do and pretend to do, that I was in despair.

"You must be right," I said at length, looking woefully up at her.

"Yes; I knew I was," she said steadily.

"I must have lost it."

"Yes."

There was no hope there. I turned to go.

"I'll lend you a nickel to get home, if you'll leave me your address," she said after a moment.

Oh, that admirable woman! She ought to be ruling empires instead of searching thieves. Look at the balance of her, Mag. My best acting hadn't shaken her. She hadn't that fatal curiosity to understand motives that wrecks so many who deal with—we'll call them the temporarily unstraight. She was satisfied just not to let me get ahead of her in the least particular. But she wasn't mean, and she would lend me a nickel—not an emotionally extravagant ten-cent piece, but just a

nickel—on the chance that I was what I seemed to be.

Oh, I did admire her; but I'd have been more enthusiastic about it if I could have seen my way clear to the baby and the paper.

I took the nickel and thanked her, but effusiveness left her unmoved. A wholesome, blue-gowned rock with a neat, full-bibbed white apron; that's what she was!

And still I lingered. Fancy Nance Olden just heartbroken at being compelled to leave a police station!

But there was nothing for it. Go, I had to. My head was a-whirl with schemes coming forward with suggestions and being dismissed as unsuitable; my thoughts were flying about at such a dizzy rate while I stood there in the doorway, the woman's patient hand on the knob and her watchful eyes on me, that I actually—

Mag, I actually didn't hear the matron's voice the first time she spoke.

The second time, though, I turned—so happy I could not keep the tremor out of my voice.

"I thought you had gone long ago," she said.

Oh, we were friends, we two! We'd chummed

over a baby, which for women is like what taking a drink together is for men. The admirable dragon in the blue dress didn't waver a bit because her superior spoke pleasantly to me. She only watched and listened.

Which puts you in a difficult position when your name's Nance O'den—you have to tell the truth.

"I've been detained," I said with dignity, "against my wish. But that's all over. I'm going now. Good-by." I nodded and caught up my skirt. "Oh!" I paused just as the admirable dragon was closing the door on me. "Is the baby asleep? I wonder if I might see her once more."

My heart was beating like an engine gone mad, in spite of my careless tone, and there was a buzzing in my ears that deafened me. But I managed to stand still and listen, and then to walk off, as though it didn't matter in the least to me, while her words came smashing the hope out of me.

"We've sent her with an officer back to the neighborhood where you found her. He'll find out where she belongs, no doubt. Good day."

XV.

Ah me, Maggie, the miserable Nance that went away from that station! To have had your future in your grasp, like that one of the Fates with the string, and then to have it snatched from you by an impish breeze and blown away, goodness knows where!

I don't know just which way I turned after I left that station. I didn't care where I went. Nothing I could think of gave me any comfort. I tried to fancy myself coming home to you. I tried to see myself going down to tell the whole thing to Obermuller. But I couldn't do that. There was only one thing I wanted to say to Fred Obermuller, and that thing I couldn't say now.

But Nance Olden's not the girl to go round long like a molting hen. There was only one chance in a hundred, and that was the one I took, of course.

"Back to the Square where you found the baby, Nance!" I cried to myself. "There's the chance that that admirable dragon has had her suspicions

aroused by your connection with the baby, which she hadn't known before, and has already dutifully notified the Sergeant. There's the chance that the baby is home by now, and the paper found by her mother will be turned over to her papa; and then it's good-by to your scheme. There's the chance that—"

But in the heart of me I didn't believe in any chance but one—the chance that I'd find that blessed baby and get my fingers just once more on that precious paper.

I blew in the A. D 's nickel on a cross-town car and got back to the little Square. There was another organ-grinder there grinding out coon-songs, to which other piccaninnies danced. But nary a little white bundle of fluff caught hold of my hand. I walked that Square till my feet were sore. It was hot. My throat was parched. I was hungry. My head ached. I was hopeless. And yet I just couldn't give it up. I had asked so many children and nurse-maids whether they'd heard of the baby lost that morning and brought back by an officer, that they began to look at me as though I was not quite right in my mind. The maids grabbed the children if they started to come near me, and the

children stared at me with big round eyes, as though they'd been told I was an ogre who might eat them.

I was hungry enough to. The little fruit-stand at the entrance had a fascination for me. I found myself there time and again, till I got afraid I might actually try to get off with a peach or a bunch of grapes. That thought haunted me. Fancy Nance Olden starved and blundering into the cheapest and most easily detected species of thieving!

I suppose great generals in their hour of defeat imagine themselves doing the feeblest, foolishest things. As I sat there on the bench, gazing before me, I saw the whole thing—Nancy Olden, after all her bragging, her skirmishing, her hairbreadth scapes and successes, arrested in broad daylight and before witnesses for having stolen a cool, wet bunch of grapes, worth a nickel, for her hot, dry, hungering throat! I saw the policeman that'd do it; he looked like that Sergeant Mulhill I met 'way, 'way back in Latimer's garden. I saw the officer that'd receive me; he had blue eyes like the detective that came for me to the Manhattan. I saw the woman jailer—oh, she was the A. D, all right,

who'd receive me without the slightest emotion, show me to a cell and lock the door, as calm, as little triumphant or affected, as though I hadn't once outwitted that cleverest of creatures—and outwitted myself in forestalling her. I saw—

Mag, guess what I saw! No, truly; what I really saw? It made me jump to my feet and grab it with a squeal.

I saw my own purse lying on the gravel almost at my feet, near the little fruit-stand that had tempted me.

Blank empty it was, stripped clean, not a penny left in it, not a paper, not a stamp, not even my key. Just the same I was glad to have it. It linked me in a way to the place. The clever little girl that had stolen it had been here in this park, on this very spot. The thought of that cute young Nance Olden distracted my mind a minute from my worry —and, oh, Maggie darlin', I was worrying so!

I walked up to the fruit-stand with the purse in my hand. The old fellow who kept it looked up with an inviting smile. Lord knows, he needn't have encouraged me to buy if I'd had a penny.

"I want to ask you," I said, "if you remember

selling a lot of good things to a little girl who had a purse this—this morning?"

I showed it to him, and he turned it over in his crippled old hands.

"It was full then—or fuller, anyway," I suggested.

"You wouldn't want to get her into trouble—that little girl?" he asked cautiously.

I laughed. "Not I. I—myself—"

I was going to say—well, you can imagine what I was going to say, and that I didn't say it or anything like it.

"Well—there she is, Kitty Wilson, over yonder," he said.

I gasped, it was so unexpected. And I turned to look. There on one of the benches sat Kitty Wilson. If I hadn't been blind as a bat and full of trouble—oh, it thickens your wits, does trouble, and blinds your eyes and muffles your ears!—I'd have suspected something at the mere sight of her. For there sat Kitty Wilson enthroned, a hatless, lank little creature about twelve, and near her, clustered thick as ants around a lump of sugar, was a crowd of children, black and white, boys and girls.

For Kitty—that deplorable Kitty—had money to burn; or what was even more effective at her age, she had goodies to give away. Her lap was full of spoils. She had a sample of every good thing the fruit-stand offered. Her cheeks and lips were smeary with candy. Her dress was stained with fruit. The crumbs of cake lingered still on her chin and apron. And Kitty—I love a generous thief—was treating the gang.

It helped itself from her abundant lap; it munched and gobbled and asked for more. It was a riot of a high old time. Even the birds were hopping about as near as they dared, picking up the crumbs, and the squirrels had peanuts to throw to the birds.

And all on Nancy Olden's money!

I laughed till I shook. It was good to laugh. Nancy Olden isn't accustomed to a long dose of the doleful, and it doesn't agree with her. I strolled over to where my guests were banqueting.

You see, Mag, that's where I shouldn't rank with the A. D. I'm too inquisitive. I want to know how the other fellow in the case feels and thinks. It isn't enough for me to see him act.

"Kitty," I said—somehow a twelve-year-old makes you feel more of a grown-up than a twelve-months-old does—"I hope you're having a good time, Kitty Wilson, but—haven't you lost something?"

She was chewing at the end of a long string of black candy—shoe-strings, all right, the stuff looks like—and she was eating just because she didn't want to stop. Goodness knows, she was full enough. Her jaws stopped, though, suddenly, as she looked from the empty purse in my outstretched hand to me, and took me in.

Oh, I know that pause intimately. It says: "Wait a minute, till I get my breath, and I'll know how much you know and just what lie to tell you."

But she changed her mind when she saw my face. You know, Mag, if there's a thing that's fixed in your memory it's the face of the body you've done up. The respectables have their rogues' gallery, but we, that is, the light-fingered brigade, have got a fools' gallery to correspond to it.

In which of 'em is my picture? Now, Margaret, that's mean. You know my portrait hangs in both.

I looked down on the little beggar that had

painted me for the second salon, and lo, in a flash she was on her feet, the lapful of good things tumbled to the ground, and Kitty was off.

I was bitterly disappointed in that girl, Mag! I was altogether mistaken in my diagnosis of her. Hers is only a physical cleverness, a talented dexterity. She had no resource in time of danger but her legs. And legs will not carry a grafter half so far as a good, quick tongue and a steady head.

She halted at a safe distance and glared back at me. Her hostility excited the crowd of children—her push—against me, and the braver ones jeered the things Kitty only looked, while the thrifty ones stooped and gathered up the spoil.

"Tell her I wouldn't harm her," I said to one of her lieutenants.

"She says she won't hurt ye, Kit," the child screamed.

"She dassent," yelled back Kitty, the valiant. "She knows I'd peach on her about the kid."

"Kid! What kid?" I cried, all a-fire.

"The kid ye swiped this mornin'. Yah! I told the cop what brought her back how ye took her jest as I—"

"Kitty!" I cried. "You treasure!" And with all my might I ran after her.

Silly? Of course it was. I might have known what the short skirts above those thin legs meant. I couldn't come within fifty feet of her. I halted, panting, and she paused, too, dancing tantalizingly half a block away.

What to do? I wished I had another purse to bestow on that sad Kitty, but I had nothing, absolutely nothing, except—all at once I remembered it—that little pin you gave me for Christmas, Mag. I took it off and turned to appeal to the nearest one of the flying body-guard that had accompanied us.

"You run on to her and tell her that if she'll show me the house where that baby lives I'll give her this pin."

He sped on ahead and parleyed with Kit; and while they talked I held aloft the little pin so that Kit might see the price.

She hesitated so long that I feared she'd slip through my hands, but a sudden rival voice piping out, "I'll show ye the house, Missus," was too much for her.

So, with Kit at a safe distance in advance to guard against treachery, and a large and enthusias-

tic following, I crossed the street, turned a corner, walked down one block and half up another, and halted before a three-story brownstone.

I flew up the stairs, leaving my escort behind, and rang the bell. It wasn't so terribly swagger a place, which relieved me some.

"I want to see the lady whose baby was lost this morning," I said to the maid that opened the door.

"Yes'm. Who'll I tell her?"

Who? That stumped me. Not Nance Olden, late of the Vaudeville, later of the Van Twiller, and latest of the police station. No—not Nance Olden . . . not . . .

"Tell her, please," I said firmly, "that I'm Miss Murieson, of the *X-Ray*, and that the city editor has sent me here to see her."

That did it. Hooray for the power of the press! She showed me into a long parlor, and I sat down and waited.

It was cool and quiet and softly pretty in that long parlor. The shades were down, the piano was open, the chairs were low and softly cushioned. I leaned back and closed my eyes, exhausted.

And suddenly—Mag!—I felt something that

was a cross between a rose-leaf and a snowflake touch my hand.

If it wasn't that delectable baby!

I caught her and lifted her to my lap and hugged the chuckling thing as though that was what I came for. Then, in a moment, I remembered the paper and lifted her little white slip.

It was gone, Mag. The under-petticoat hadn't a sign of the paper I'd pinned to it.

My head whirled in that minute. I suppose I was faint with the heat, with hunger and fatigue and worry, but I felt myself slipping out of things when I heard the rustling of skirts, and there before me stood the mother of my baby.

The little wretch! She deserted me and flew to that pretty mother of hers in her long, cool white trailing things, and sat in her arms and mocked at me.

It was easy enough to begin talking. I told her a tale about being a newspaper woman out on a story; how I'd run across the baby and all the rest of it.

"I must ask your pardon," I finished up, "for disturbing you, but two things sent me here—one

to know if the baby got home safe, and the other," I gulped, "to ask about a paper with some notes that I'd pinned to her skirt."

She shook her head.

It was in that very minute that I noticed the baby's ribbons were pink; they had been blue in the morning.

"Of course," I suggested, "you've had her clothes changed and—"

"Why, yes, of course," said baby's mother. "The first thing I did when I got hold of her was to strip her and put her in a tub; the second, was to discharge that gossiping nurse for letting her out of her sight."

"And the soiled things she had on—the dress with the blue ribbons?"

"I'll find out," she said.

She rang for the maid and gave her an order.

"Was it a valuable paper?" she asked.

"Not—very," I stammered. My tongue was thick with hope and dread. "Just—my notes, you know, but I do need them. I couldn't carry the baby easily, so I pinned them on her skirt, thinking—thinking—"

The maid came in and dumped a little heap of white before me. I fell on my knees.

Oh, yes, I prayed all right, but I searched, too. And there it was.

What I said to that woman I don't know even now. I flew out through the hall and down the steps and—

And there Kitty Wilson corralled me.

"Say, where's that stick-pin?" she cried.

"Here!—here, you darling!" I said, pressing it into her hand. "And, Kitty, whenever you feel like swiping another purse—just don't do it. It doesn't pay. Just you come down to the Vaudeville and ask for Nance Olden some day, and I'll tell you why."

"Gee!" said Kitty, impressed. "Shall—shall I call ye a hansom, lady?"

Should she! The blessed inspiration of her!

I got into the wagon and we drove down street—to the Vaudeville.

I burst in past the stage doorkeeper, amazed to see me, and rushed into Fred Obermuller's office.

"There!" I cried, throwing that awful paper on the desk before him. "Now cinch 'em, Fred Ober-

muller, as they cinched you. It'll be the holiest blackmail that ever— oh, and will you pay for the hansom?"

XVI.

I don't remember much about the first part of the lunch. I was so hungry I wanted to eat everything in sight, and so happy that I couldn't eat a thing.

But Mr. O. kept piling the things on my plate, and each time I began to talk he'd say: "Not now —wait till you're rested, and not quite so famished."

I laughed.

"Do I eat as though I was starved?"

"You—you look tired, Nance."

"Well," I said slowly, "it's been a hard week."

"It's been hard for me, too; harder, I think, than for you. It wasn't fair to me to let me—think what I did and say what I did. I'm so sorry, Nance,—and ashamed. So ashamed! You might have told me."

"And have you put your foot down on the whole thing; not much!"

He laughed. He's got such a boyish laugh in spite of his chin and his eye-glasses and the big-

ness of him. He filled my glass for me and helped me again to the salad.

Oh, Mag, it's such fun to be a woman and have a man wait on you like that! It's such fun to be hungry and to sit down to a jolly little table just big enough for two, with carnations nodding in the tall slim vase, with a fat, soft-footed, quick-handed waiter dancing behind you, and something tempting in every dish your eye falls on.

It's a gay, happy, easy world, Maggie darlin'. I vow I can't find a dark corner in it—not to-day.

None but the swellest place in town was good enough, Obermuller had said, for us to celebrate in. The waiters looked queerly at us when we came in—me in my dusty shoes and mussed hair and old rig, and Mr. O. in his working togs. But do you suppose we cared?

He was smoking and I was pretending to eat fruit when at last I got fairly launched on my story.

He listened to it all with never a word of interruption. Sometimes I thought he was so interested that he couldn't bear to miss a word I said. And then again I fancied he wasn't listening at all to

me; only watching me and listening to something inside of himself.

Can you see him, Mag, sitting opposite me there at the pretty little table, off in a private room by ourselves? He looked so big and strong and masterful, with his eyes half closed, watching me, that I hugged myself with delight to think that I—I, Nancy Olden, had done something for him he couldn't do for himself.

It made me so proud, so tipsily vain, that as I leaned forward eagerly talking, I felt that same intoxicating happiness I get on the stage when the audience is all with me, and the two of us—myself and the many-handed, good-natured other fellow over on the other side of the footlights—go careering off on a jaunt of fun and fancy, like two good playmates.

He was silent a minute when I got through. Then he laid his cigar aside and stretched out his hand to me.

"And the reason, Nance—the reason for it all?"

I looked up at him. I'd never heard him speak like that.

"The reason?" I repeated.

"Yes, the reason." He had caught my hand.

"Why—to down that tiger Trust—and beat Tausig."

He laughed.

"And that was all? Nonsense, Nance Olden, there was another reason. There are other tiger trusts. Are you going to set up as a lady-errant and right all syndicate wrongs? No, there was another, a bigger reason, Nance. I'm going to tell it to you—what!"

I pulled my hand from his; but not before that fat waiter who'd come in without our noticing had got something to grin about.

"Beg pardon, sir," he said. "This message must be for you, sir. It's marked immediate, and no one else—"

Obermuller took it and tore it open. He smiled the oddest smile as he read it, and he threw back his head and laughed a full, hearty bellow when he got to the end.

"Read it, Nance," he said, passing it over to me. "They sent it on from the office."

I read it.

"Mr. Fred W. Obermuller, Manager Vaudeville Theater, New York City, N. Y.:

Dear Obermuller:—I have just learned from your little protégée, Nance Olden, of a comedy you've written. From what Miss Olden tells me of the plot and situations of *And the Greatest of These*—your title's great—I judge the thing to be something altogether out of the common; and my secretary and reader, Mr. Mason, agrees with me that properly interpreted and perhaps touched up here and there, the comedy ought to make a hit.

Would Miss Olden take the leading rôle, I wonder?

Can't you drop in this evening and talk the matter over? There's an opening for a fellow like you with us that's just developed within the past few days, and—this is strictly confidential—I have succeeded in convincing Braun and Lowenthal that their enmity is a foolish personal matter which business men shouldn't let stand in the way of business. After all, just what is there between you and them? A mere trifle; a misunderstanding that half an hour's talk over a bottle of wine with a good cigar would drive away.

If you're the man I take you for you'll drop in

this evening at the Van Twiller and bury the hatchet. They're good fellows, those two, and smart men, even if they are stubborn as sin.

Counting on seeing you to-night, my dear fellow,

I am most cordially,

I. M. Tausig."

I dropped the letter and looked over at Obermuller.

"Miss Olden," he said severely, coming over to my side of the table, "have you the heart to harm a generous soul like that?"

"He—he's very prompt, isn't he, and most—"

And then we laughed together.

"You notice the letter was marked personal?" Obermuller said. He was still standing beside me.

"No—was it?" I got up, too, and began to pull on my gloves; but my fingers shook so I couldn't do a thing with them.

"Oh, yes, it was. That's why I showed it to you. . . . Nance—Nance, don't you see that there's only one way out of this? There's only one woman in the world that would do this for me and that I could take it from."

I clasped my hands helplessly. Oh, what could I

do, Maggie, with him there and his arms ready for me!

"I—I should think you'd be afraid," I whispered. I didn't dare look at him.

He caught me to him then.

"Afraid you wouldn't care for an old fellow like me?" he laughed. "Yes, that's the only fear I had. But I lost it, Nancy, Nancy Obermuller, when you flung that paper down before me. That's quite two hours ago—haven't I waited long enough?"

* * * * * * * * * * *

Oh, Mag—Mag, how can I tell him? Do you think he knows that I am going to be good—good! that I can be as good for a good man who loves me, as I was bad for a bad man I loved!

XVII.

PHILADELPHIA, January 27.

Maggie, dear:

I'm writing to you just before dinner while I wait for Fred. He's down at the box-office looking up advance sales. I tell you, Maggie Monahan, we're strictly in it—we Obermullers. That Broadway hit of mine has preceded me here, and we've got the town, I suspect, in advance.

But I'm not writing to tell you this. I've got something more interesting to tell you, my dear old Cruelty chum.

I want you to pretend to yourself that you see me, Mag, as I came out of the big Chestnut Street store this afternoon, my arms full of bundles. I must have on that long coat to my heels, of dark, warm red, silk-lined, with the long, incurving back sweep and high chinchilla collar, that Fred ordered made for me the very day we were married. I must be wearing that jolly little, red-cloth toque caught up on the side with some of the fur.

Oh, yes, I knew I was more than a year behind the times when I got them, but a successful actress wears what she pleases, and the rest of the world wears what pleases her, too. Besides, fashions don't mean so much to you when your husband tells you how becoming—but this has nothing to do with the Bishop.

Yes, the Bishop, Mag!

I had just said, "Nance Olden—" To myself I still speak to me as Nancy Olden; it's good for me, Mag; keeps me humble and for ever grateful that I'm so happy. "Nance, you'll never be able to carry all these things and lift your buful train, too. And there's never a hansom round when it's snowing and—"

And then I caught sight of the carriage. Yes, Maggie, the same fat, low, comfortable, elegant, sober carriage, wide and well-kept, with rubber-tired wheels. And the two heavy horses, fat and elegant and sober, too, and wide and well-kept. I knew whose it was the minute my eyes lighted on it, and I couldn't—I just couldn't resist it.

The man on the box—still wide and well-kept—was wide-awake this time. I nodded to him as I slipped in and closed the door after me.

"I'll wait for the Bishop," I said, with a red-coated assurance that left him no alternative but to accept the situation respectfully.

Oh, dear, dear! It was soft and warm inside as it had been that long, long-ago day. The seat was wide and roomy. The cushions had been done over—I resented that—but though a different material, they were a still darker plum. And instead of *Quo Vadis*, the Bishop had been reading *Resurrection*.

I took it up and glanced over it as I sat there; but, you know, Mag, the heavy-weight plays never appealed to me. I don't go in for the tragic—perhaps I saw too much of the real thing when I was little.

At any rate, it seemed dull to me, and I put it aside and sat there absent-mindedly dreaming of a little girl-thief that I knew once when—when the handle of the door turned and the Bishop got in, and we were off.

Oh, the little Bishop—the contrast between him and the fat, pompous rig caught me! He seemed littler and leaner than ever, his little white beard scantier, his soft eye kindlier and his soft heart—

"God bless my soul!" he exclaimed, jumping almost out of his neat little boots, while he looked sharply over his spectacles.

What did he see? Just a red-coated ghost dreaming in the corner of his carriage. It made him doubt his eyes—his sanity. I don't know what he'd have done if that warm red ghost hadn't got tired of dreaming and laughed outright.

"Daddy," I murmured sleepily.

Oh, that little ramrod of a bishop! The blood rushed up under his clear, thin, baby-like skin and he sat up straight and solemn and awful—awful as such a tiny bishop could be.

"I fear, Miss, you have made a mistake," he said primly.

I looked at him steadily.

"You know I haven't," I said gently.

That took some of the starch out of him, but he eyed me suspiciously.

"Why don't you ask me where I got the coat, Bishop Van Wagenen?" I said, leaning over to him.

He started. I suppose he'd just that moment remembered my leaving it behind that day at Mrs. Ramsay's.

"Lord bless me!" he cried anxiously. "You haven't—you haven't again—"

"No, I haven't." Ah, Maggie, dear, it was worth a lot to me to be able to say that "no" to him. "It was given to me. Guess who gave it to me."

He shook his head.

"My husband!"

Maggie Monahan, he didn't even blink. Perhaps in the Bishop's set husbands are not uncommon, or very likely they don't know what a husband like Fred Obermuller means.

"I congratulate you, my child, or—or did it—were you—"

"Why, I'd never seen Fred Obermuller then," I cried. "Can't you tell a difference, Bishop?" I pleaded. "Don't I look like a—an imposing married woman now? Don't I seem a bit—oh, just a bit nicer?"

His eyes twinkled as he bent to look more closely at me.

"You look—you look, my little girl, exactly like the pretty, big-eyed, wheedling-voiced child I wished to have for my own daughter."

I caught his hand in both of mine.

"Now, that's like my own, own Bishop!" I cried.

Mag—Mag, he was blushing like a boy, a prim, rather scared little school-boy that somehow, yet—oh, I knew he must feel kindly to me! I felt so fond of him.

"You see, Bishop Van Wagenen," I began softly, "I never had a father and—"

"Bless me! But you told me that day you had mistaken me for—for him."

The baby! I had forgotten what that old Edward told me—that this trusting soul actually still believed all I'd told him. What was I to do? I tell you, Mag, it's no light thing to get accustomed to telling the truth. You never know where it'll lead you. Here was I—just a clever little lie or two and the dear old Bishop would be happy and contented again. But no; that fatal habit that I've acquired of telling the truth to Fred and you mastered me—and I fell.

"You know, Bishop," I said, shutting my eyes and speaking fast to get it over—as I imagine you must, Mag, when you confess to Father Phelan—"that was all a—a little farce-comedy—the whole business—all of it—every last word of it!"

"A comedy!"

I opened my eyes to laugh at him; he was so bewildered.

"I mean a—a fib; in fact, many of them. I—I was just—it was long ago—and I had to make you believe—"

His soft old eyes looked at me unbelieving. "You don't mean to say you deliberately lied!"

Now, that was what I did mean—just what I did mean—but not in that tone of voice.

But what could I do? I just looked at him and nodded.

Oh, Maggie, I felt so little and so nasty! I haven't felt like that since I left the Cruelty. And I'm not nasty, Maggie, and I'm Fred Obermuller's wife, and—

And that put a backbone in me again. Fred Obermuller's wife just won't let anybody think worse of her than she can help—from sheer love and pride in that big, clever husband of hers.

"Now, look here, Bishop Van Wagenen," I broke out, "if I were the abandoned little wretch your eyes accuse me of being I wouldn't be in your carriage confessing to you this blessed minute when it'd be so much easier not to. Surely—surely, in your experience you must have met girls that go

wrong—and then go right for ever and ever, Amen. And I'm very right now. But—but it has been hard for me at times. And at those times—ah, you must know how sincerely I mean it—at those times I used to try to recall the sound of your voice, when you said you'd like to take me home with you and keep me. If I had been your daughter you'd have had a heart full of loving care for me. And yet, if I had been, and had known that benevolent fatherhood, I should need it less—so much less than I did the day I begged a prayer from you. . . . But—it's all right now. You don't know —do you?—I'm Nance Olden."

That made him sit up and stare, I tell you. Even the Bishop had heard of Nancy Olden. But suddenly, unaccountably, there came a queer, sad look over his face, and his eyes wouldn't meet mine.

I looked at him puzzled.

"Tell me what it is," I said.

"You evidently forget that you have already told me you are the wife of Mr.—Mr. Ober—"

"Obermuller. Oh, that's all right." I laughed aloud. I was so relieved. "Of course I am, and he's my manager, and my playwright, and my sec-

retary, and—my—my dear, dear boy. There!" I wasn't laughing at the end of it. I never can laugh when I try to tell what Fred is to me.

But—funny?—that won him.

"There! there!" he said, patting me on the shoulder. "Forgive me, my dear. I am indeed glad to know that you are living happily. I have often thought of you—"

"Oh, have you?"

"Yes—I have even told Mrs. Van Wagenen about you and how I was attracted to you and believed—ahem!"

"Oh—oh, have you!" I gave a wriggle as I remembered that Maltese lace Maria wanted and that I—ugh!

But, luckily, he didn't notice. He had taken my hand and was looking at me over his spectacles in his dear, fatherly old way.

"Tell me now, my dear, is there anything that an old clergyman can do for you? I have an engagement near here and we may not meet again. I can't hope to find you in my carriage many more times. You are happy—you are living worthily, child? Pardon me, but the stage—"

Oh, the gentle courtesy of his manner! I loved his solicitude. Father-hungry girls like us, Maggie, know how to value a thing like that.

"You know," I said slowly, "the thing that keeps a woman straight and a man faithful is not a matter of bricks and mortar nor ways of thinking nor habits of living. It's something finer and stronger than these. It's the magic taboo of her love for him and his for her that makes them—sacred. With that to guard them—why—"

"Yes, yes," he patted my hand softly. "Still, the old see the dangers of an environment that a young and impulsive woman like you, my dear, might be blind to. Your associates—"

"My associates? Oh, you've heard about Beryl Blackburn. Well—she's—she's just Beryl, you know. She wasn't made to live any different. Some people steal and some drink and some gamble and some . . . Well, Beryl belongs to the last class. She doesn't pretend to be better than she is. And, just between you and me, Bishop, I've more respect for a girl of that kind than for Grace Weston, whose husband is my leading man, you know. Why, she pulls the wool over his eyes

and makes him the laughing-stock of the company. I can't stand her any more than I can Marie Avon, who's never without two strings—"

All at once I stopped. But wasn't it like me to spoil it all by bubbling over? I tell you, Maggie, too much truth isn't good for the Bishop's set; they don't know how to digest it.

I was afraid that I'd lost him, for he spoke with a stately little primness as the carriage just then came to a stop; I had been so interested talking that I hadn't noticed where we were driving.

"Ah, here we are!" he said. "I must ask you to excuse me, Miss—ah, Mrs.—that is—there's a public meeting of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children this afternoon that I must attend. Good-by, then—"

"Oh, are you bound for the Cruelty, too?" I asked. "Why, so am I. And—yes—yes—that's the Cruelty!"

The Cruelty stands just where it did, Mag, when you and I first saw it; most things do in Philadelphia, you know. There's the same prim, official straight up-and-downness about the brick front. The steps don't look so steep now and the building's not so high, perhaps because of a sky-

scraper or two that've gone up since. But it chills your blood, Maggie darlin', just as it always did, to think what it stands for. Not man's inhumanity to man, but women's cruelty to children! Maggie, think of it, if you can, as though this were the first time you'd heard of such a thing! Would you believe it?

I waked from that to find myself marching up the stairs behind the Bishop's rigid little back. Oh, it was stiff and uncompromising! Beryl Blackburn did that for me. Poor, pretty, pagan Beryl!

My coming with the Bishop—we seemed to come together, anyway—made the people think he'd brought me, so I must be just all right. I had the man bring in the toys I'd got out in the carriage, and I handed them over to the matron, saying:

"They're for the children. I want them to have them all and now, please, to do whatever they want with them. There'll always be others. I'm going to send them right along, if you'll let me, so that those who leave can take something of their very own with them—something that never belonged to anybody else but just themselves, you understand. It's terrible, don't you know, to be a deserted child or a tortured child or a crippled child and have

nothing to do but sit up in that bare, clean little room upstairs with a lot of other strangelings—and just think on the cruelty that's brought you here and the cruelty you may get into when you leave here. If I'd had a doll—if Mag had only had a set of dishes or a little tin kitchen—if the boy with the gouged eye could have had a set of tools—oh, can't you understand—"

I became conscious then that the matron—a new one, Mag, ours is gone—was staring at me, and that the people stood around listening as though I'd gone mad.

Who came to my rescue? Why, the Bishop, like the manly little fellow he is. He forgave me even Beryl in that moment.

"It's Nance Olden, ladies," he said, with a dignified little wave of his hand that served for an introduction. "She begins her Philadelphia engagement to-night in *And the Greatest of These*."

Oh, I'm used to it now, Maggie, but I do like it. All the lady-swells buzzed about me, and there Nance stood preening herself and crowing softly till—till from among the bunch of millinery one of them stepped up to me. She had a big smooth

face with plenty of chins. Her hair was white and her nose was curved and she rustled in silk and—

It was Mrs. Dowager Diamonds, alias Henrietta, alias Mrs. Edward Ramsay!

"Clever! My, how clever!" she exclaimed, as though the sob in my voice that I couldn't control had been a bit of acting.

She was feeling for her glasses. When she got them and hooked them on her nose and got a good look at me—why, she just dropped them with a smash upon the desk.

I looked for a minute from her to the Bishop.

"I remember you very well, Mrs. Ramsay. I hope you haven't forgotten me. I've often wanted to thank you for your kindness," I said slowly, while she as slowly recovered. "I think you'll be glad to know that I am thoroughly well—cured. . . . Shall I tell Mrs. Ramsay how, Bishop?"

I put it square up to him. And he met it like the little man he is—perhaps, too, my bit of charity to the Cruelty children had pleased him.

"I don't think it will be necessary, Miss Olden," he said gently. "I can do that for you at some future time."

And I could have hugged him; but I didn't dare.

We had tea there in the Board rooms. Oh, Mag, remember how we used to peep into those awful, imposing Board rooms! Remember how strange and resentful you felt—like a poor little red-haired nigger up at the block—when you were brought in there to be shown to the woman who'd called to adopt you!

It was all so strange that I had to keep talking to keep from dreaming. I was talking away to the matron and the Bishop about the play-room I'm going to fit up out of that bare little place upstairs. Perhaps the same child doesn't stay there very long, but there'll always be children to fill it —more's the cruel pity!

Then the Bishop and I climbed up there to see it and plan about it. But I couldn't really see it, Mag, nor the poor, white-faced, wise-eyed little waifs that have succeeded us, for the tears in my eyes and the ache at my heart and the queer trick the place has of being peopled with you and me, and the boy with the gouged eye, and the cripple, and the rest.

He put his gentle thin old arm about my shoul-

ders for a moment when he saw what was the matter with me. Oh, he understands, my Bishop! And then we turned to go downstairs.

"Oh—I want—I want to do something for them," I cried. "I want to do something that counts, that's got a heart in it, that knows! You knew, didn't you, it was true—what I said downstairs? I was—I am a Cruelty girl. Help me to help others like me."

"My dear," he said, very stately and sweet, "I'll be proud to be your assistant. You've a kind, true heart and—"

And just at that minute, as I was preceding him down the narrow steps, a girl in a red coat trimmed with chinchilla and in a red toque with some of the same fur blocked our way as she was coming up.

We looked at each other. You've seen two peacocks spread their tails and strut as they pass each other? Well, the peacock coming up wasn't in it with the one going down. Her coat wasn't so fine, nor so heavy, nor so newly, smartly cut. Her toque wasn't so big nor so saucy, and the fur on it —not to mention that the descending peacock was a brunette and . . . well, Mag, I had my

day. Miss Evelyn Kingdon paid me back in that minute for all the envy I've spent on that pretty rig of hers.

She didn't recognize me, of course, even though the two red coats were so near, as she stopped to let me pass, that they kissed like sisters, ere they parted. But, Mag, Nancy Olden never got haughty that there wasn't a fall waiting for her. Back of Miss Kingdon stood Mrs. Kingdon—still Mrs. Kingdon, thanks to Nance Olden—and behind her, at the foot of the steps, was a frail little old-fashioned bundle of black satin and old lace. I lost my breath when the Bishop hailed his wife.

"Maria," he said—some men say their wives' first names all the years of their lives as they said them on their wedding-day—"I want you to meet Miss Olden—Nance Olden, the comedian. She's the girl I wanted for my daughter—you'll remember, it's more than a year ago now since I began to talk about her?"

I held my breath while I waited for her answer. But her poor, short-sighted eyes rested on my hot face without a sign.

"It's an old joke among us," she said pleasantly, "about the Bishop's daughter."

We stood there and chatted, and the Bishop turned away to speak to Mrs. Kingdon. Then I seized my chance.

"I've heard, Mrs. Van Wagenen," I said softly and oh, as nicely as I could, "of your fondness for lace. We are going abroad in the spring, my husband and I, to Malta, among other places. Can't I get you a piece there as a souvenir of the Bishop's kindness to me?"

Her little lace-mittened, parchment-like hands clasped and unclasped with an almost childish eagerness.

"Oh, thank you, thank you very much; but if you would give the same sum to charity—"

"I will," I laughed. She couldn't guess how glad I was to do this thing. "And I'll spend just as much on your lace and be so happy if you'll accept it."

I promised Henrietta a box for to-night, Maggie, and one to Mrs. Kingdon. The Dowager told me she'd love to come, though her husband is out of town, unfortunately, she said.

"But you'll come with me, won't you, Bishop?" she said, turning to him. "And you, Mrs. Van?"

The Bishop blushed. Was he thinking of Beryl,

I wonder. But I didn't hear his answer, for it was at that moment that I caught Fred's voice. He had told me he was going to call for me. I think he fancied that the old Cruelty would depress me —as dreams of it have, you know; and he wanted to come and carry me away from it, just as at night, when I've waked shivering and moaning, I've felt his dear arms lifting me out of the black night-memory of it.

But it was anything but a doleful Nance he found and hurried down the snowy steps out to a hansom and off to rehearsal. For the Bishop had said to me, "God bless you, child," when he shook hands with both of us at parting, and the very Cruelty seemed to smile a grim benediction, as we drove off together, on Fred and

NANCY O.

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